

unshaved TRUTHS!

issue 3, featuring:

*Don Webb, Wendy Wheeler, Carlos Rumbaut, Jerod Pore,
Paco Xander Nathan, Blade X... and many more!*

Suggested for open minded readers...

unshaved TRUTHS!

issue 3
winter 1992-93

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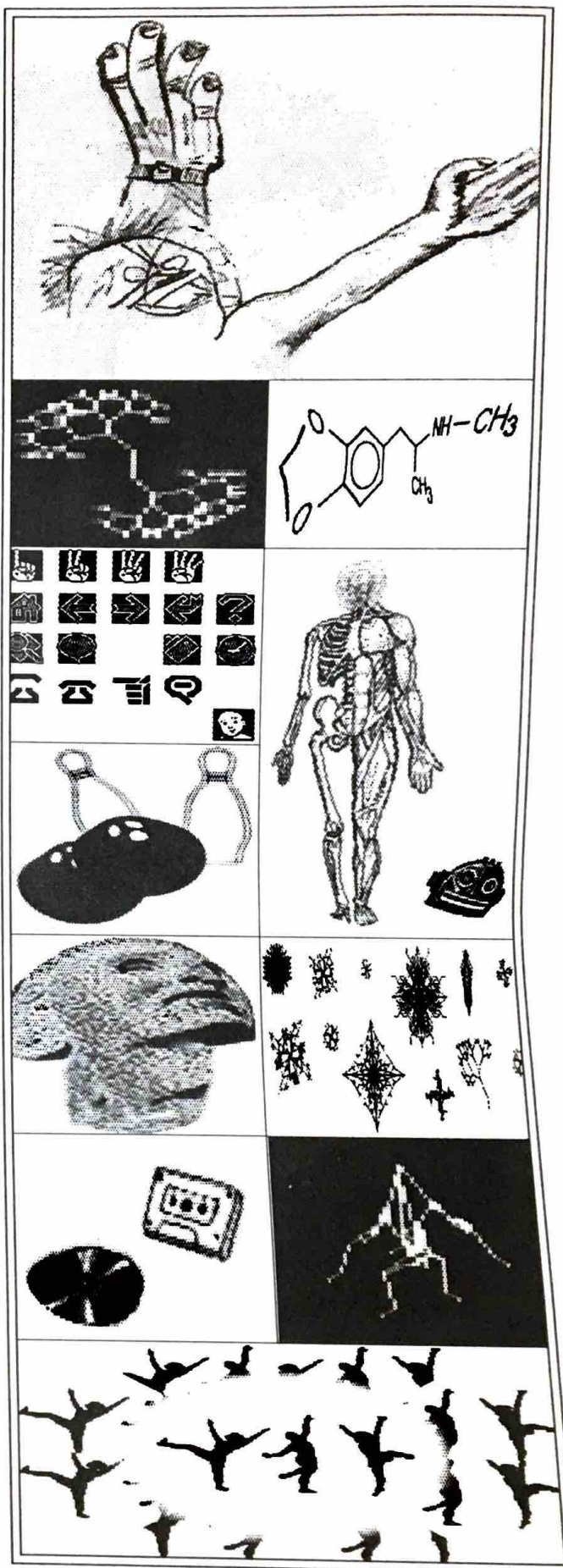
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This issue is dedicated to the memory of John Cage:

“

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DREAM

EDITORIAL by joni

There always has to be something new, every generation demands it, but today's neophile is overwhelmed because this world really is new. Instant global communication is almost a cliché; we hardly remember what it was like to fear *communist takeover*. The world is fast and fragmented, and reality is up for grabs. A "cyber" culture is evolving around computer networks, and for many of us this virtual environment is the context for 21st century political organization, because it's in cyberspace that our minds will thrive, possibly to the detriment of our bodies (but that's another story).

The folk I meet in my day-to-day don't have a clear sense what's happening. They're uncomfortable, they're a bit insecure, but they don't quite know why. Some think it's because George Bush is an asshole, or because taxes and infrastructure swallow most of their dollars, or because they're not getting laid often enough or by the right people. It doesn't occur to them that they're fucking *scared to death* because the whole world is changing right before their eyes, mutating in ways they'd never imagined. Even science fiction writers can't keep up with it (except by writing gonzo nonfiction).

When I take what I think is a clear look at the world and what's happening in it, I get a weird sort of anxiety. It feels like I'm flying apart. It's like anxiety about death; you try to think about other things, you fantasize sex and power, you think about surfing the edges, making the scenes... anything but the *real* real, which is more chaotic than ever before.

So, I'm trying to embrace the chaos, stare the craziness in its swirling eyeballs. After all, avoidance only FEEDS it.

What's happening now, the sickness of spirit, the splintering of reality as we thought we knew it, is a manifestation of deep weirdness, deep beyond dreams. You have to dig for it, you won't find it in the mundane patterns of your waking world. Fragmentation, alienation, happened long ago, before history... *your first face, before you were born*. We're living in the dream that exploded. How do we fix it? Maybe we don't. Maybe we should learn to read crop circles, evolve fractal intelligence.

Begins with the story of the maid. Ethnic, devoted. I think she's responding to an ad. An old house. Many residents therein appear to be asleep. One older woman who's not asleep asks the maid to shuck corn. She begins... The older woman implies that there may be no money to pay her, but the maid continues anyway. It's a finite load of corn, she's almost finished. Then someone comes, another household member, I think... undresses the maid's feet. Straw! The maid is straw, like a scarecrow.

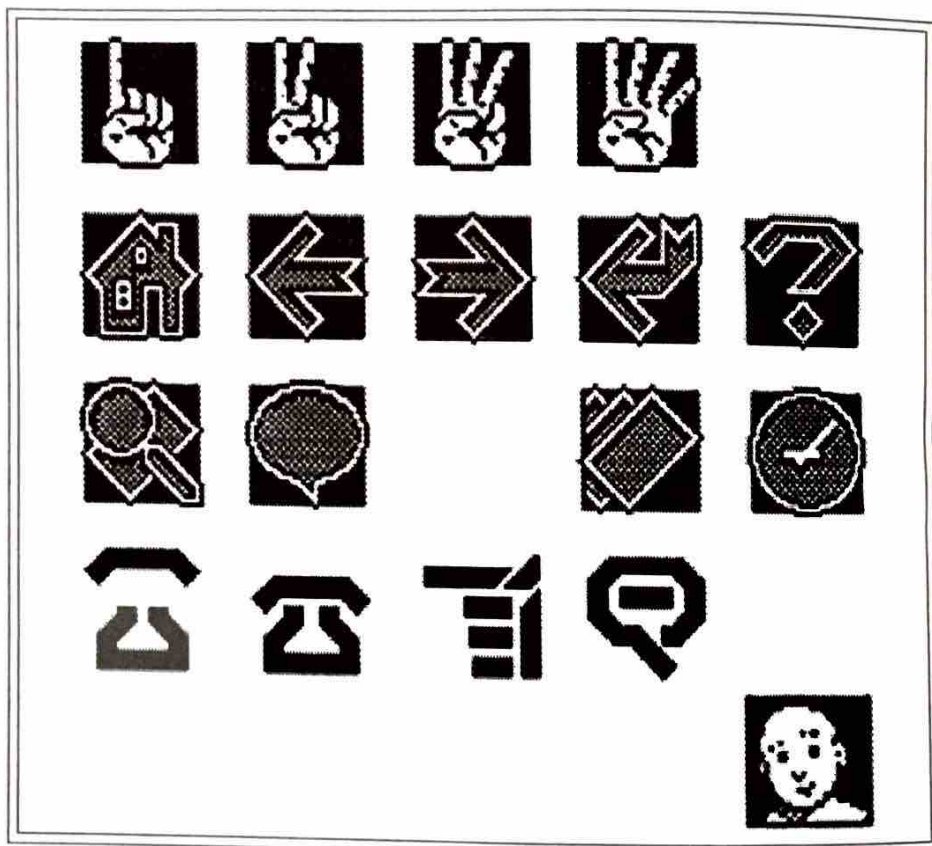
Fade to a cop story: Weird happenings. A worker tearing down a condemned building sees a shape. There's a woman who can change...morph, playing through various shapes, looking for the one she likes. I'm a cop, and I'm with three other cops (two women and a man, names known but unknown, following dream logic). We try to get a handle on this shape-changing weirdness. Something's bro-

EPOCH/ELLIPSIS NOW!

epoch... *the beginning of a new and important period in the history of anything*
ellipsis... *indicating an intentional omission of words or letters or an abrupt change of thought, lapse of time, incomplete statement, etc.*

In America the tension is between "order" and revolution... chaos may be confusion or it may be the *first face, before you were born...* while we were waiting for God to make up his mind we made our beds but there was always that *one crease in the sheet* that we could not quite straighten...

If this is the last lap, is it time to start another race? It does appear that the *human race* has exhausted its fuel, so what is it: the finish line, or a pit stop? Assume the latter: in the pit, the mechanix are toying with *cyborganic* forms... synthetic fuels and engine modifications, lubricants of strange viscosity, carburetor kits from



ken, falling... a crane or other large construction machine. I catch it and deflect it.

She appears with a marshmallow face, like the girl in the radiator in Eraserhead. I'm not clear what we, the police, are doing, how we're involved, what we're looking for... or how this relates to the "corn" sequence...

A rooster crows outside my window. The sun is rising.

the next dimension. You've never exhausted your resources 'til you've exhausted your ingenuity. If we can escape organic cliché and find new architectures for mortality, perhaps we'll survive, even *win* the race. But then, to survive is to win, in the cooperative sense of coevolution. With whom would we compete? If we compete with the roaches and bees and ants, can we ever win?

I've watched ants at close range with a magnifier. Their movements are subtle. I'm not sure that they are so unlike us. I once agonized in the Buddhist way over the death of an ant I'd killed in a fit of sting, and someone told me not to worry, that I'd killed, not the intelligence, but one cell within a group brain, group intelligence. The colony is *Group Mind*, she said; each member a cell, seemingly independent, but that's the genius of anthood: independent movement, sure, but psychically dependent on, inseparable from, the group.

Humans imagine that each member of the "colony" is individual and unique, but the implications are otherwise. "Group-think" describes a phenomenon old as history, and psychic alignment of group members creates a force for survival, if nothing else. However, this group organism has no ethics apart from its leaders' values, it seems. You may think that you have values, but have you examined them lately? Are they really yours?

Psychologist Stanley Milgram conducted an experiment in which the subjects thought they were administering painful electric shocks to individuals they could hear but not see. (This was a setup, no one was really hurt.) The "shocks" were administered at the direction of an authority figure (white lab coat = authority). Milgram was surprised to learn how far his subjects would go with the shocks: many continued even when the shocks appeared to be life-threatening.

Sadism is the antithesis of unity, and more: not only does it celebrate the presumed gulf between one being and another, it reinforces the presumed difference with pain and control: *you are in pain and I am not, and I create your pain*. In the soft sadism of b&d sex, pain and pleasure perform a unifying dance, at once acknowledging and transcending difference.

Buddha. Bodhisattva. We are all one, but the one dreams difference. In our dreams we touch the one. Shamanic rituals, ayahuasca dreams, transport the dancers to a realm of understanding where the unity is no longer theoretical, but *real*. And all that is real is one.

The shaman is of the jungle, but what of the contemporary urban scene? Its psychic landscape is more fragmented than any other. What's real, what's one, is *there*, but *buried, hidden*. It will not be televised. It will not be sucked into the flickering camcorder reality that we have made primary.

unshaved TRUTHS!

THREE HUNDRED

FICTION

by Robert Glenn

Hardin Lee studied the alley, breathing deeply to relax. Then his attention moved to focus on the green numbers in the upper right corner of the heads-up display. He crouched slightly and shifted both feet. The laser rangefinder indicated 22.80 meters. Spectral analysis showed high oil concentrations near the center, fading away to the right. Perfect.

Hardin pushed both hands forward and stepped with the right foot. His right arm swung back in a pendulum arc, the other sweeping gracefully outward. The thin tubular frame surrounding Hardin's right arm guided the elbow close to the body. Tiny servos hummed as they dampened the arc when the arm reached a horizontal plane. The arm swung forward, keeping perfect rhythm with the soft footsteps. As Hardin's arm passed vertical, the wrist servos rotated his hand counterclockwise.

The ball disengaged from his thumb and Hardin felt his fingers flatten momentarily as the metal-backed digits imparted left. Hardin switched his visor to tracking mode while the servos guided his right arm into its follow-through.

The tracker recorded the initial slide of the ball and the change in angular velocity during the roll. At a distance of just under fifteen meters, the ball's trajectory changed. It hooked to the left, striking the headpin precisely as the ball crossed the seventeenth board of the laminated wooden surface. The sensory accelerator blanked Hardin's visor and fed visual impulses directly to the occipital lobes of his cerebral cortex. Subjective time slowed as the headpin bounced into the two pin, which hit the four, which toppled the seven. The ball drove back into the three pin, then the five, and the nine. The three and five pins completed the slow-motion dance by upending the six, then, and eight pins. Ultrasonic motion detectors determined the transfer of momentum from ball to pins and calculated the minute trajectory adjustment necessary to optimize Hardin's next roll, in the tenth frame.

Satisfied, Hardin flipped up the visor and walked back down the approach to where his wife, Janelle, and the Smithsons sat. The women were engrossed in another of Jon Smithson's stories. Figured. Another perfect strike ball and not one of them had been looking. It didn't

matter. A gutter ball or a strike. It was all the same to them. Hardin disabled the frame's power assist. It took a moment to adjust to having complete control of his limbs. Then he lowered himself slowly into a chair beside the others.

"Hardin, Jon bought you a beer," Janelle said. She slid the pin-shaped bottle over to him.

"Thanks," Hardin mumbled. He brought the bottle to his lips, then hesitated, not wanting the alcohol to interfere with his concentration, but not wanting to be impolite. He let a small amount of beer into his mouth, changed his mind, and let it flow back into the bottle as he lowered it. When he set the bottle on the table, it began to foam. Hardin instinctively reached for the bottle with his right hand and banged the frame-encased arm into the table, upsetting his bottle and another one. Hardin tried to stand, but his knee brace caught under the chair seat and he abruptly sat back down.

Janelle grabbed the two bottles and the Smithsons quickly dammed the pools of beer with their napkins.

Hardin's face reddened. "Sorry. I don't know how that happened."

"That's OK," said Lisa Smithson, but she stared at his arm. Jon stared at his visor. Janelle just glared.

Jon got up to take his turn and Janelle leaned close to Hardin. "Why can't you be sociable?" she whispered. Then to Lisa: "So, did I tell you what the housekeeper did last week? Couldn't believe it. You would've died. Got disoriented and fell into the swimming pool. It kept running circles around the deep end until the battery finally ran down." Both women laughed.

"We were lucky the seals held," Hardin said. "The water damage to its circuitry would have been serious."

"Good thing the maintenance drone wasn't on," Janelle said, "or the two might have fought to the death over who got to skim the bottom." Lisa burst out laughing again. Hardin lowered his visor and tracked Jon's second ball, noting only insignificant variations in the lane's surface conditions.

The visor's display zoomed in as the ball approached the pins. Upon contact the pins flew. One rebounded toward Hardin. Then flew with impossible speed directly at him. Hardin yelled and ducked. Nothing happened. He slowly raised his head and lifted the visor. Lisa held a beer bottle in front of his face. Her other hand covered her mouth and she shook with silent laughter. Janelle laughed so hard that tears rolled down her cheeks.

By the time his turn came again, Hardin was ready. He made the necessary adjustments and released two more perfect rolls. Two more strikes. Hardin held the ball and carefully wiped its surface with a towel.

"Watch out for that bottle," Lisa called out.

Hardin almost dropped the ball. The towel floated to the floor. Hardin took a deep breath. He disengaged the knee servos to allow him to squat and pick up the towel.

Hardin faced the alley again and cleared his mind for his twelfth and final ball. Just one more strike. One more perfect roll. He pushed the ball forward and then back into the pendulum arc.

Something was wrong!

He stepped awkwardly forward, trying to synchronize feet with arms.

Feet! The knee servos! He hadn't reactivated them after squatting to pick up his towel. Hardin tried to stop, but the arm servo continued its unceasing swing. The momentum of the ball pulled Hardin forward and he took six quick tiptoe steps trying to catch up. Too late he released the ball and lofted it far out onto the alley where it landed with a thud. He heard laughter behind him as he frantically switched to tracking mode.

The ball was well inside the intended trajectory, glowing red on the visor's display. Flashing red numerals showed the ball's aberrant

angular velocity. The sensory accelerator engaged. Hardin watched in horror as the ball rolled perfectly straight. Seven meters to go, six, five, then the hook began. The ball crossed board sixteen, board seventeen.

Too far!

Board eighteen, then contact with the headpin. The headpin hit the two pin a glancing blow, taking down the four and the seven. The three, five, eight, and nine pins fell, but the six flew by the ten. Hardin's knees sagged. The headpin rebounded from the gutter onto the center of the lane where it rolled in a lazy spiral. Hardin counted the minute striations in the surface of the pin as it rolled, slower and slower, into the base of the ten pin.

The ten pin leaned, l-e-a-n-e-d, and fell. Hardin sank to his knees.

"All right. Out of the way and I'll show you how it's supposed to be done," Jon said. Hardin flipped his visor up and watched as Jon used the joystick to guide the ball drone onto the approach. Slowly Hardin rose and walked back toward the table.

"Hardin, you are so old-fashioned," Janelle said.

Lisa smiled and said, "I think it's cute the way you roll the ball yourself."

Hardin kept on walking. Behind him came the rush of compressed air as the drone sent another ball down the alley.



JOE SLACKS OFF

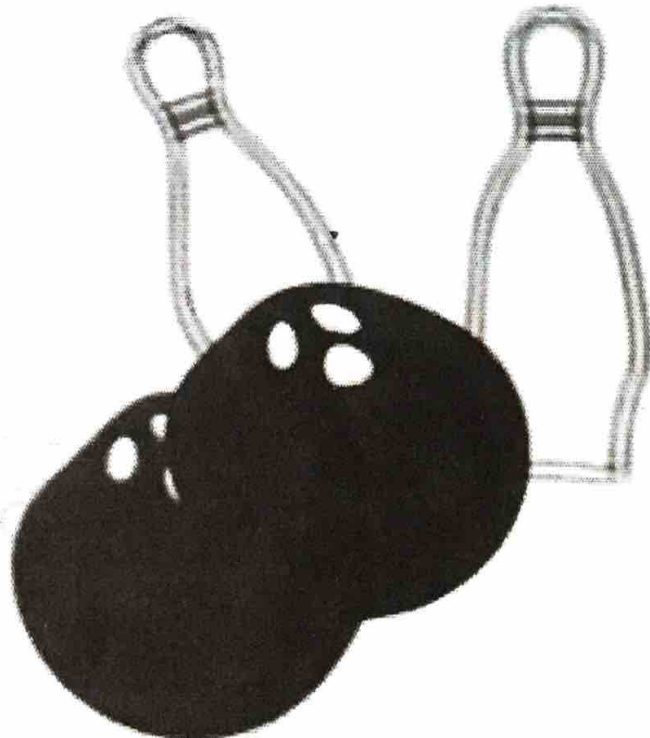
FICTION

by Don Webb

The dreams come up from the dry cracked caliche arroyos. Joe liked to come here and watch them as they drifted by. They don't look like much outside of people's heads — just little dabs of fog, sometimes with a little color in them. They'd come up the arroyos slow, and they fooled you, making you think they was blown by the breeze. If you watched carefully, and Joe was so empty inside he was a perfect witness, they moved like jellyfish in the sea. When they'd break free of the arroyos they really gained speed, zipping away to the houses and apartments and hospitals and jails in the city.

Joe'd seen them hanging around in the upper corners of bedrooms masquerading as cobwebs or shadows. They'd wait there, like a hunter in a blind, for the person to come and sleep. Then they'd slip in quick like through the nostrils. Sometimes people locked them out, like the winos who lived in the alleys near the Salvation Army building. The drunks built thick walls of booze that locked dreams from their sleep. The dreams would wait as long as they could, but would finally have to attack the winos when they were awake. Joe'd seen them in the park — sometimes three or four dreams crawling over the body of just one wino who'd shake and scream.

Joe'd stand and watch the dreams come for an hour or an hour-and-a-half each morning before work. Then he'd walk back to his bicycle and cycle on in. Joe told everybody that he worked at Pantex, where his job was TOP SECRET because everyone in Amarillo knew they made the Bombs at Pantex. But Joe just said that so he wouldn't have to discuss his REAL job. His REAL job was secret too. Joe worked in a tan-painted two story building on Amarillo Boulevard. The first floor — the cover operation as the boys called it — had big plate glass windows with Tenniel's Bike Repair painted in big red letters. Joe Fong Naismith (not to be confused with our hero), a slender half-Chinese man with Hawaiian shirts and mirrored sunglasses, ran the counter. Joe Janis Lull and Joe Jean Gattegno did the bike repair in two large rooms in the back. They were very good — not a single complaint in fifteen years. But they were in on the secret work, the REAL work upstairs. You bet.



Upstairs Joe, our hero, along with Joe McGarrity Buki, Joe Terry Zadiel, and Joe Washington Brown did the REAL work. Our Joe and Joe McGarrity Buki did the typing. Joe Washington Brown supervised the shop and ran the Machine. Joe Terry Zadiel stuck the little slips into the fortune cookies. In many ways T.Z.'s work (they all called each other by the last two initials except for our hero whom they called Joe, figuring that someone had to be called Joe) was the hardest. He was pretty adept with the chopsticks but never gained the finesse of a native born.

The fortune cookies came out a blue PVC pipe from the ceiling. There'd be a "pop" and a fortune cookie would drop into the foam-lined cookie cup in front of T.Z. T.Z.'d take the cookie with his right hand (1), pick up the folded message with the chopsticks in his left hand (2), rotate the cookie to the insertion angle of 23.50° (3), stuff the message through the crack (a process involving both hands) (4), transfer the enmessaged cookie to his left hand (5), and drop the cookie (carefully not dropping the chopsticks) into the red PVC pipe which ran down through the floor (and on to the Chinese Cookie Pipeline, Joe supposed) (6). Then there would be another "pop."

T.Z. could process four cookies a minute. W.B. regulated the flow with a knob on the Machine. The original knob had been lost and W.B. had replaced it with a knob from his oven. Four cookies a minute was "Medium High."

Part of the Machine was a Teletype. It would produce the messages with their frequency indicated in parentheses. A typical selection of messages — such as the one Joe was typing now — would be:

Attentiveness to small things will bring your fortune in the coming week. (5)

You love Chinese food. (2)

Well meaning friends make poor jailers. (3)

The wise man accomplishes all by doing nothing. (1)

You'll soon make a new dark-haired friend. (3)

Joe (and M.G.) would type the messages on a thin ticker tape. W.B. would pick up the tape periodically and feed it into a slot in the black box section of the Machine. The Machine would scan them, verify the count, and fold them. W.B. would pick up the folded messages and carry them to T.Z.'s holder.

W.B. had written a pamphlet, "Our Job and Why We Do It." Joe read the pamphlet almost every night. Mantrayoga. It helped center him.

Every morning Joe knew who he was, where he was going, and why.

Our Job and Why We Do It

by

Joe Washington Brown

The secret fortune plant in Amarillo, Texas provides 98% of the Free World's Chinese Fortune Cookie Fortunes. For security purposes, it is located far from the cookie makers and distributors. Cookies are transported here by pipeline for enmessaging and then sent to various distributors in proportions determined by the Senate Committee on Unfolding Reality. Allow me to anticipate some of your questions.

Q. How does the Machine receive the messages?

A. The Machine contains a single electron suspended in a magnetic bottle. The electron moves in a complex dance revealing the entire shape of the universe. This illustrates the Quantum Inseparability Principle. (Those of you who are interested in more info, please ask for my pamphlet, "QUIP and You.")

Q. Why is our job controlled by the Senate Committee on Unfolding Reality?

A. Reality is a consensus affair deriving from the aggregation of individual reactions to Chinese Fortune Cookie Fortunes. Reality used to be controlled by God, but after *Mordieu* it fell into the hands of man. When someone reads a Fortune, his/her expectations, perceptions, and actions are modified. Reality is therefore like the Dow-Jones average, its overall shape determined by countless minor transactions.

Q. Why is a chance principle used to generate fortunes?

A. If a single man or group of men wrote the fortunes they would tend to shape the world to their own ends. We avoid that fearsome type of dictatorship by allowing the universe to create itself — via the medium of fortune cookies.

Q. Why would foreign agents be interested in our work?

A. If foreign agents could tally the fortunes they could perceive the direction that the Free World is taking. Foreknowledge dissipates the illusion of Free Will. And as you can see, No Free Will = No Free World. You can bet your bottom dollar that the Communist and Islamic Fundamentalist Chinese Fortune Cookie Fortune writers keep tabs on their fortunes. Monthly reports are no doubt read in Peking and Tehran as the restrictive ones seek to perpetuate a never-ending web of totalitarianism.

Over fifteen years in his Top Secret job, Joe had grown dissatisfied with W.B.'s arguments. If Reality is manifested through fortune cookies — they should better it! They shouldn't just add randomness in the hope that personally determined freedoms would somehow arise from chaos. The fortune cookie writers could change everything. They could make a more free, more resplendent future. He would be more than a cog in the world machine.

He shared his dream with his bosses.

They said no.

He argued.

They said no.

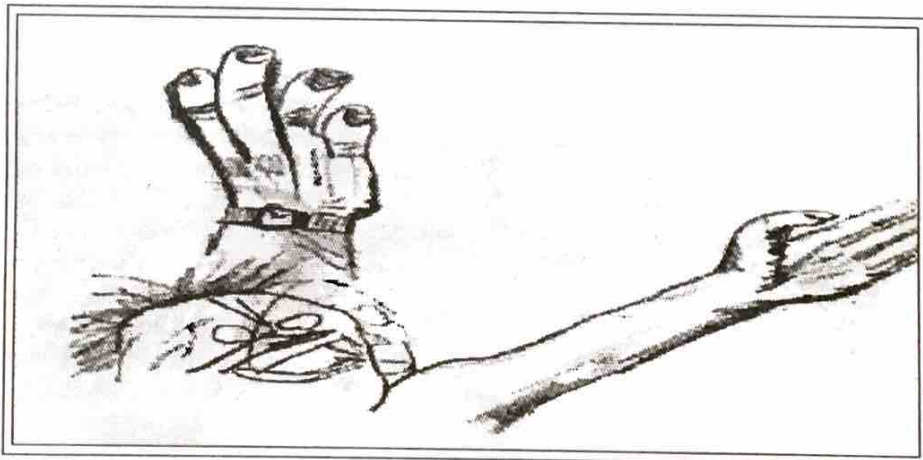
He told them he would resign.

They told him *no one* resigns.

So he decided to sneak a message to the world through the cookies.

Pantex Inspector No. 23 didn't know whether to pass the last group of neutron bombs. The head engineer Joseph Kowan had written a Magic Marker message on each of them.

On each bomb, Joseph had written, *HELP! I'm being held prisoner in a Chinese fortune cookie factory!*



PERFECT BEAUTY

FICTION

by Wendy Wheeler

"There's a lady here to see you, Miz Lafayette," Odette calls from the doorway of the study, then bites her lip. Her apron, brilliant white against her black uniform, is wrinkled and creased. Even now her large dark hands twist the crisp linen.

Helen Lee Lafayette looks up from her Carlos Falchi appointment book. Her sleek blonde hair is pulled back with a fourteen-caret-gold clip. Her eyes, cool topaz blue within masses of dark lashes, appraise Odette. "I hope you didn't answer the door looking like that." Her voice is low and mellow, all traces of a twang completely expunged. "I'd be mortified if anyone saw a member of my staff looking like that."

Odette puts her hands behind her back. "No ma'am. I—I mean, yes ma'am. About this lady—"

Helen glances at that day's entries in her calendar. "Oh, this must be the woman from the National Art Guild. Did you show her to the second drawing room?" The second drawing room is done in shades of teal and salmon, Helen's most flattering colors.

Odette lets out her breath. "Yes ma'am, the second drawing room. She's in there now." As Helen places a marker in her book and inserts her Mark Cross pen back into its case, something sly and triumphant shines through Odette's eyes. "I'm sorry about my apron, Miz Lafayette, I really am. It's just that Miz Doris, she never made me wear no uniform, and—"

Helen stands up from her Louis XIV desk and smooths her skirt, topaz blue like her eyes. "How long has it been since Mrs. Doris was your employer, Odette?" Her voice crackles with a tension absent in her languid pose. "Over a year, isn't it? I suggest you accustom yourself to things as they are, or there are other changes I can make in this household."

Odette nods her head and flees.

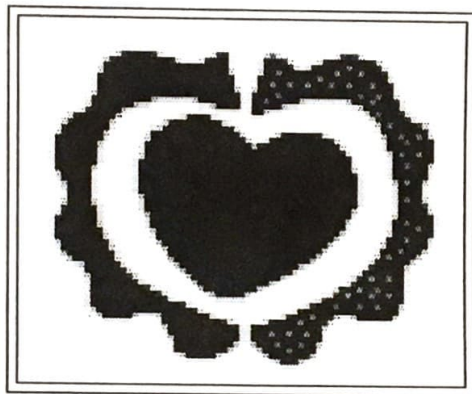
Helen steps to the antique mirror beside the door. She runs an exquisitely manicured hand down her long neck, and smiles. The walk from the study to the drawing room takes her down hallways gleaming with green travertine marble, through rooms crisply redecorated in white and gold French period furniture. The house she shares with her husband, Boyd Lafayette, with its prestigious River Oaks address, is fast becoming a Houston showpiece, featured in no

less than three design magazines in the past few months.

The woman sitting on the flowered chintz love seat in Helen's drawing room has her head bent over her crochet. Her hair is dark auburn with threads of white. It is twisted into a heavy knot at the nape of her neck so that her silver and turquoise earrings show. They match her fine squash blossom necklace, a necklace almost obscured by many multi-colored scarves and vests in a style both artistic and flamboyant. She looks fiftyish, her figure thick and matronly. Her heavy floral perfume fills the sunny room.

The woman doesn't look up until Helen speaks.

"Hello, I'm Helen Lafayette. So glad you could come by." Helen sits in her usual chair across from the love seat so that she can see her own reflection in the huge mirror covering the wall opposite her. She notices a plant in a small ceramic pot on the coffee table between them.



Tiny crimson buds peek from among dark glossy leaves. "Oh, what lovely blooms," Helen says. "Did you bring this for me? Thank you so much."

The woman has gray eyes, pale and eerie in her tan face. "*De nada.*" Her voice is husky with a heavy accent. "For you, Senora Lafayette. A gift because you take this time with me. We call it *Soga de Muerte*, vine of the soul."

Helen fingers a waxy leaf. "Oh, you don't have to thank me. When the National Art Guild contacted me about their Esteemed Advocates Award, well, it was an honor and such a surprise. My work for the Fine Arts Museum has been a joy, a true joy. Ms.—ah?"

"Aroncio. Agriopa Aroncio. *Por favor*, you call me Agriopa." She holds up her handiwork, a small white doily with an odd spiky design. "You do not mind I do this as we talk? My hands, they always need something to keep them busy."

"Certainly not." Helen's words drip with urbanity. She lifts one eyebrow. "I thought, however—this is an interview, isn't it?"

Agriopa pauses in her crochet. "Ah, sí. The interview." She dives into her large fabric handbag and comes up with a pocket recorder. She places it on the table between them, next to the flowering vine. "*Gracias.* I do not write such good notes, so I make the tapes instead. ¿Con permiso?"

"As you wish." Helen inclines her head graciously. Light falls with exquisite care on her perfect cheekbones. She watches this with a casual eye in the mirror over Agriopa's shoulder. "Now, ask away. I'm only too glad to promote the arts community in Houston. As you can see, I've done my part to support it." She gestures at the original oils and prints that dominate the four walls and at the fine art photographs, many of them pictures of her, framed in antique pewter and displayed on a low table.

Agriopa's eyes never leave Helen's face. The white linen thread slides between her fingers as the doily grows larger. "Senora Lafayette, your history as patroness of the arts is well known. What we talk about now is other things, eh? Perhaps more important things. You are a very lovely woman; some people say the most beautiful woman in Texas."

Helen smiles. The mirror Helen smiles too, a polite showing of teeth. "You flatter me, Agriopa."

Agriopa shakes her head. Strands of hair have escaped and frizzed out around her face. "No, not flattery. *Felicidades* on your achievement. On work well done."

Helen blinks. "Oh?"

Odette stands at the door, a heavy silver tray in her hands. "I brought y'all some ice tea, Miz Lafayette. Miz Aroncio said—I mean, I thought y'all might be thirsty."

"Well." Helen's face shows polite surprise. "I am, a little. And you, Agriopa? Would you? Yes?" Helen waves Odette over. "Put it on the table then, where we can get to it."

Odette's hands are tight on the edge of the tray, but even with her careful positioning, the tray thumps as she puts it down, rattling the two glasses of tea.

"Odette." Helen speaks through clenched teeth. Odette looks up and her eyes meet Helen's in the mirror. Helen's expression is enigmatic. Odette's face grows slack and still.

"Can you hand me my glass, *por favor*?" Agriopa speaks and the moment is broken. Odette puts a crystal tumbler in Agriopa's

hand. Agriopa pinches a sprig from the soul vine and puts it in her glass. "This is a very delicious thing to try, Senora Lafayette. Much like mint, but sweeter."

"Oh, I don't..." Helen begins, eyeing the glossy leaves. Odette snorts, a sound almost a snicker. Helen turns to the maid. "That will be all, Odette." Odette darts a look at Agriopa and backs out of the room. After she leaves, Helen breaks off a bit of leaf and drops it into her tea. She sips hesitantly at first, then her face shows slight approval.

Most of Agriopa's tea is already gone. She runs her fingers up and down the moist glass. Her hands are plump, somewhat swollen, and shining with silver, turquoise, carnelian and jasper rings. "I know some things about you I think not everybody knows," she says. "You were young girl in Cyprus, no?"

Helen watches ice cubes spin in her glass. "Cyprus Texas, yes," she says. "A horribly small town. I was born there—"

"Is fitting, you think? *Como La Afrodita*, like the island where the goddess of beauty was born. But you leave there, to find a place better for a girl with such a face, such a body. A place, *comprende*, where there are many dollars, many men."

Helen puts her empty glass down on the tray. There is a pause, then she asks coolly, "Is this information for the Esteemed Advocates Award? I'm afraid I had no idea of the depth of background you required on the candidates."

Agriopa's eyes are wide and innocent. "*Por favor*, is necessary we discuss these things. You were most beautiful girl in Cyprus, yes? You win the contest of beauty?"

"A silly contest. It didn't mean anything to me, but some people made much over it." Helen looks at her Piaget watch. "If you'll excuse me, I've suddenly remembered another appointment—" She starts to stand, and Agriopa's next words halt her in the act.

"Roxanne Chandler, the young girl who competes against you, in that year 1964. What does she do now, you wonder?"

Helen sits back in her chair. Her hands flutter a moment, then drop to her lap. Her eyes go to her reflection as if checking for composure. The Mirror Helen sits rigidly straight. "There was a terrible accident when we were still in school," Helen says. "A fire—"

Agriopa finishes her tea and places her glass, not on the tray, but directly on the wood table, next to the recorder. A ring begins to form around it. "Si, a terrible thing. I talk to this woman, Roxanne. Even today, after twenty-

five years, the face, it is scarred, twisted. I talk with her, and she remembers a dream. You and she, standing before a mirror. Your eyes are filled with anger. You strike a match." Here, Agriopa extends her arm. "You touch the match to her reflection—"

"Oh, please, Ms. Arancio." Helen folds her arms and crosses her legs. "That was a long time ago. And since then, poor Roxanne's obviously gotten addicted to Demerol."

Agriopa's fingers feel around in her lap until she finds her metal hook. She begins to crochet again, long chains of linen thread. "Si, a sad, scarred woman. But she knows your history well. She tells how you go on to Dallas. You model the clothes, you got to the parties, you pose for many photographs. *La Bonita Perfecta*. You marry then, the first time—"

"My first husband was Connor Freeman, a photographer. That marriage ended due to his alcoholism. I can't believe you'd bring that up. I was shattered for many years."

Agriopa's fingers fly. Her pale eyes stare at Helen without blinking. "Senor Freeman is in the hospital, you know this? The mental home."

Helen looks out the window. "I'm not surprised. He was always weak minded."

"He tells strange stories about you, too. He says he never drank until you left him, until you wanted to divorce. He says he would watch you for hours in the mirror, combing your beautiful hair. As he watches, he says, his mind grows more tired and weak. *Pobrecito*. He is so sick. He calls you a witch."

Helen sighs. The light streaming in through the window reflects off her eyes, making them shimmer like shallow water. "Is there a point to all this?"

Agriopa nods and grins. Her teeth are large and white. "Ah, the point. Si, the point. I apologize for talking on and on. I will not tell you, then, of the other things I found. Only to say: you used your beauty well. That shows good planning. And you hid much; the things that happened when someone made a trouble for you, hard now to discover. I who know the *hedor*, the smell of such things. Even I could not find these so easy." She gives a sharp tug to her ball of linen thread, and it tumbles off her lap and rolls toward Helen.

Helen automatically bends down to pick it up. The ball is about the size of her fist, the linen thread soft and white. Helen's fingers close around it. The thread clings to them. With her other hand, Helen tries to tear the ball away.

Agriopa holds the end of the string, feeling the jerks and tugs. She grins again, then snaps

the ball back into her lap with a flick of her wrist. "Your handsome, rich husband, Boyd Lafayette," she continues. "He is your third husband, no? And he was married before; he lived in this grand house with his first wife."

Helen continues to rub her hands as if they're still tacky from the thread. Her voice is flat. "Doris Lafayette. You were a friend of Doris Lafayette."

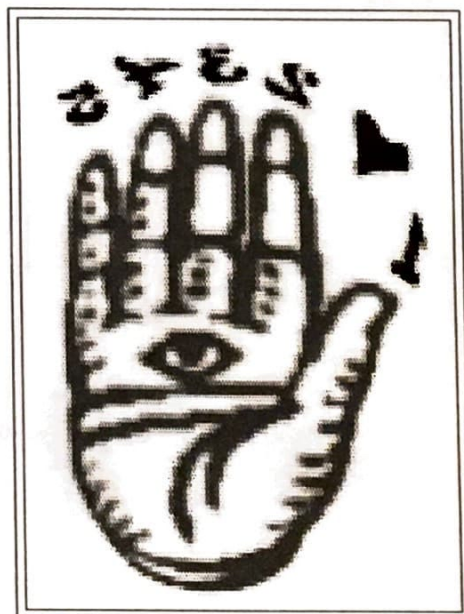
Agriopa shakes her head sadly. She spreads the doily out on her lap. It is almost finished, an airy design with eight points radiating out from a center circle. "No, you were the friend of *mihita* Doris. Such a close friend, like sisters, she told me. She believed you loved her, was flattered you seek her out—"

"If you weren't Doris's friend, then how do you know these things?" Helen's aquiline nose wrinkles into a snarl. She sees this in the mirror and erases all expression.

Agriopa's eyes grow moist. She closes them, and a twinge of something moves across her face. "I was more than the friend of Doris McCarthy Montoya Lafayette. I was her *madrina*. You know this word? Her godmother. From the time she is a baby, I am the one responsible for her soul. Now I ask myself: why did I not believe her when she tells me of her evil friend?"

Helen has pleaded ugly lines in her silk skirt. She licks her lips before she speaks. "These are crazy stories," she says. "No one will believe you."

Agriopa reaches for the recorder on the table. She finds it after a fumbling second. "I think I know how you kill my *ahjada*. You make her spirit sick, you take away her joy. She dies of the shadow you put over her. Then Boyd, he



watches you, maybe, in a mirror. He sees how beautiful you are. *La Bonita Perfecta*. Ah, Boyd knows me, *comprende*. He knows how I like the voices of my *ninas*, so he is the one who gives me this recorder. I think I play for him this thing."

The recorder has never been set to record. Agriopa presses a button now and a soft sad voice says, "Tell Boyd. Tell him, *mi madrina*. If Helen takes him when I die, you'll know I told the truth. She was never my friend, she's wishing me dead..."

Helen hugs herself as though the August day is chill. She rocks in her chair a moment, but when she looks up, her smile is bright and confident. "That doesn't mean anything. It would just hurt Boyd to think Doris was out of her head at the end."

Agriopa's husky voice is quiet. "I use it if I must."

"It's up to me to make sure he's not hurt." Helen's gaze is riveted to her own reflection. The Mirror Helen seems all glowing phosphor, bright as a match flame. "You stupid meddling woman," Helen says. "You've met your death. It's right in this room. Turn around and look behind you!"

Agriopa's eyes stay on Helen's face. She seems to smile a moment, snorts as if amused. Then she turns in her seat to face the large low mirror behind her.

Helen's eyes meet the eyes of Agriopa's reflection, and Helen laughs, a sound of victory. Her blue irises glitter like reflections on ice. She begins to croon, "You belong to me now, you belong to me now, crazy woman, insane woman, crazy woman..."

Agriopa's face seems to grow stony.

"...crazy woman, you think you see witches, crazy woman, too sick to live, too sick to live..."

In the mirror, Agriopa's eyes break the contact with Helen's, slide away, looking at nothing. Then Agriopa shrugs and turns back around

in her chair to face Helen again, her back to the mirror.

"Ah, *si*, I believe in witches," says Agriopa. "I am a *bruja* myself. *Pero*, I work with the flowers and seeds."

Helen's jaw drops. Her eyes are round with surprise.

Agriopa digs through her purse and pulls out some thorny stems. She leans forward until her fingers touch the pot of soul vine. She breaks off a leaf. "Surprised, *La Bonita*? You think only you have powers such as these? You want to see some of my *brujaria*? I show you." Agriopa cuts her own thumb with a thorn, then wraps the crochet thread around the bloody leaf and stem. "You are a woman of great deceit, *Bonita Perfecta*, for under your skin you are not beautiful at all. I can see the truth. With my *brujaria*, I show you."

Helen looks at the white-wrapped bundle in Agriopa's hand. "I don't know how you withstood me that time," she says, her voice high and scratchy. "But you're not leaving this—ahhh!" Helen's hands fly to her face, as if something has stung her. Startled, she looks to the mirror. Her skin is becoming redder and redder. Beads of sweat cluster on her upper lip and at her hairline. Across her chin, cheeks and forehead, tiny bumps erupt. "My face!" she cries.

"¿*Como esta?*" smiles Agriopa. Her mouth is twisted as if she tastes something bitter. "What's happening to your beauty, *Senora*?"

"You should know!" spits Helen. "You're doing it! My face, it's breaking out with something horrible." She springs out of her chair and races around the love seat to the big mirror. She stands stunned for a long moment, seeing the wreck of her beauty. As she watches, the red bumps turn into red mounds, each with a yellow center. Helen's eyes grow wider as the skin around them is pulled tauter and tauter. Her hands clench into fists, then unclench to slap the mirror. "No!" She tries to turn away from the sight, but finds her palms are stuck to the

glass. She tugs, whimpering, twists her body, but her hands are glued there, her fingers spread as if displaying her manicure.

Agriopa remains in the love seat, her back to Helen. She begins to put her crochet things in her purse. "Deceiving everyone with your beauty, *La Bonita*? Not everyone can be deceived. Those with eyes see the truth. It is the last lesson you will ever learn, Evil One, the end of your *malvado*." She sighs and lays her head back for a moment. "Rest in peace, *mi nina* Doris, rest in peace, *mi corazon*. Ah, Dios, I am so tired. I think Odette will know what needs to be done next."

Helen sags at the mirror, horrified eyes watching her face. The red pumps turn into yellow pustules with black centers. The black centers grow larger and begin to twitch from side to side. Helen's face is pulled into macabre grimaces. Then, from one pustule, then another, then another, two black feathery legs emerge. More thread-like legs follow, until each bump is crowned with what looks like a black flower. The flowers shake themselves free and are revealed as spiders.

The spiders begin to march purposefully up and down Helen's face, leaving trails of silk behind them. Other fuzzy shapes appear in the vacated holes, and a second crop of spiders is soon struggling to break free.

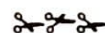
Helen opens her mouth as if to scream, but gags and coughs instead. Puffs of wet spider web drift from her mouth to cling to the mirror. Her sleek blonde head is soon covered with a layer of white silk. The silk is tattered around her nostrils and mouth, but more spiders are hard at work on the next layer.

Helen's eyes roll back in her head, and she slumps unconscious, dangling from her two hands. The spiders continue to crawl back and forth, up and down, back and forth, up and down.

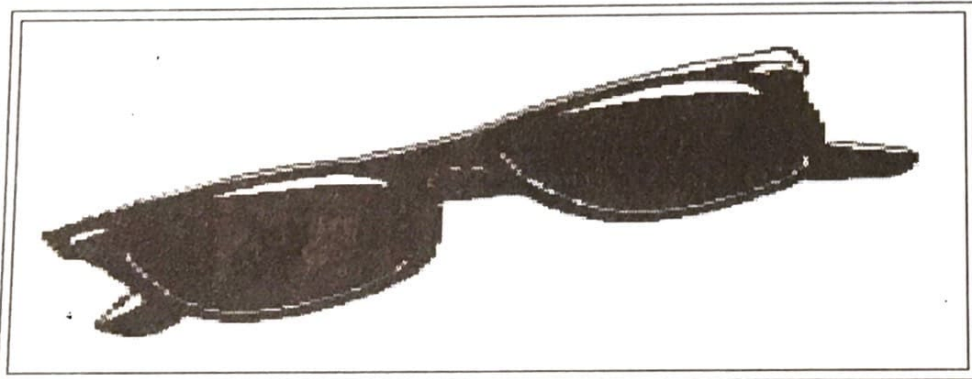
From her pocket, Agriopa takes a pair of glasses with dark green lenses and puts them on. She takes a sectioned length of wood from her purse, gives it a shake to unfold it.

"I must use the cane now," she remarks, as if to herself. "It was hard at first, giving up *mi vision*. But I do this for Doris, for her memory. It is my penance."

The bruja Agriopa Aroncio taps her way out of the drawing room, calling over her shoulder as she goes, "*Adios, La Bonita*. May God rest your soul."



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MUSHROOM WITH A VIEW

FICTION

by Peter Meyer

We were six men, all white, middle-class professionals, mostly in our 40s, who had gathered together (some of us having traveled hundreds of miles) to take part in a psychedelic mushroom session. For the course of a weekend we were to leave the mainstream worlds of corporate capitalism, high technology or professional practice in order to make contact with a more authentic level of our being - whatever the mushroom might care to show us.

Four of us, including the group leader, a man in his 50s, had considerable previous experience with psychedelics. For the lawyer, Joe, this was the first excursion into the psychedelic realm since his acid trips fifteen years earlier. Len, the financial manager, had never before done anything stronger than marijuana, and although keen, had little idea of what to expect.

We sat around during the day, smoked a few joints and got to know one another, discussing our reasons for having made the (in some cases considerable) effort needed to be here in order to do this strange thing together. All of us, more or less successful in our careers, were seeking something more satisfying than the toys and material comforts which were represented in consumer-capitalist society as the proper rewards for loyalty to the established system.

In late afternoon we parted to wander the rural retreat in which we found ourselves and to reflect on life. As dusk settled we gathered by the sweat lodge, where a fire was burning, heating the rocks that would be needed. We stripped naked, formed a circle and passed around a joint as the group leader invoked the powers of the six directions and asked for their protection in this excursion that we were about to take into the realms beyond ordinary reality.

We entered the sweat lodge on hands and knees, and sat hunched up around the central pit. Glowing red-hot rocks were placed in the pit, the flap of the lodge was sealed and we sat there in complete darkness, the temperature rising. Water was cast upon the rocks, producing steam, which made things very hot indeed. We all sweated profusely. Unfortunately at this point one of us had the bright idea of casting some incense upon the hot rocks. This produced clouds of smoke which, in the airtight sweat lodge, made breathing difficult. It was

very dark, very hot, and we all wondered how long we could survive. It was like being in one of the hell worlds, the hot, dark, smoky hell world.

Eventually the group leader crawled out and we followed, gasping the fresh night air. After a short time we returned. Fresh glowing red-hot rocks were added, but this time only water, not incense, was cast upon them. We sweated. This is a purification ritual long used by American Indians, and a suitable preparation for a psychedelic voyage.

We crawled out again, went back for a third session, then finally emerged and threw ourselves in the swimming pool, relieved at having returned to life after the symbolic (but all too tangible) immersion in the hell realms.

We dressed and took our places in a circle around the campfire, which was set under a large teepee-like structure. We each sat on small chairs, and each had a water bottle and a sleeping bag in case it got cold during the night. The group leader's German shepherd dog was there, in the darkness beyond the light of the campfire, to watch over us during the night.

We passed a joint and the group leader went around the circle, presenting each of us with a small packet of dried mushrooms wrapped in a bandanna. He gave us also a small painted ceramic on a length of rawhide to wear around our necks, so that in case we got into some difficult place this would be our ticket back. We unwrapped the mushrooms from the bandanna (which some of us tied around our heads). There were about eight grams of crunchy, dried mushrooms (somewhat more than the usually-effective dose of five grams), which we ate with water.

We had not eaten since breakfast. The effects began to come on in about half an hour. My consciousness was carried into a state that was clearly non-normal. It was somewhat overwhelming, and I felt a tendency to drift into unconsciousness, but reminded myself that this was definitely not recommended. There was an almost subliminal geometric hallucination going on, occurring on the margins of consciousness. I felt the presence of the mushroom, and asked often: "Who are you? What are you?" It was definitely leading me in some direction, I knew not where.

At about this point it became clear that Len, our novice tripper, was becoming agitated. He got up from his chair, put it aside, lay down on the sleeping bag and was obviously quite uncomfortable as regards what was happening. He was being swept off into a realm of con-

sciousness that before he never knew existed. Being a very intellectual and verbal type of person, he kept trying to make sense of it all. He said later, "I kept wishing I would return to a normal state so that I could figure out what the hell was happening!" For several hours he tossed and turned on or in the sleeping bag, perplexed.

An hour or so after we had taken the mushrooms, with everyone tripping hard, Joe, the other member of our group with no recent psychedelic experience, retreated from the circle around the campfire into the surrounding darkness. He was, we knew, somewhere out there, but we were not much concerned. As Len later remarked, "At first I kept wanting to know what to do, how to behave. But then I realized what everyone else obviously knew, that here everyone was on their own." The four more-



experienced members of the group stayed in their chairs most of the time, gazing into the fire. There was no sound except for the incessant chirping of the cicadas in the trees. We

then became aware of some weird noises - snorts, snuffles and yelps. "What's that!" cried Len, somewhat disconcerted. "Must be the dog," he concluded. More snorts, grunts and whines - unearthly sounds. This was beginning to get rather strange. We realized it was Joe. "It's Joe!" cried Len. "I thought it was the fucking dog! But it's Joe!" The unearthly sounds continued. One of the other members of the group commented dryly, "Well, what do you expect? He's been a lawyer for fifteen years." We were then treated to a series of the weirdest sounds that I have ever heard. These were no human sounds. This was obviously some really weird entity from some very alien realm, such as H.P. Lovecraft used to write about, which had been attracted by this group of humans entering non-normal reality, and which had seized upon Joe's body to express itself, though what it was attempting to express was impossible to comprehend.

I thought this all rather odd, but having previously met entities from some very strange and non-physical spaces I received this cacophony of alien articulations with a detached interest. Len, however, was freaking out. The alien entity suddenly began to express itself more loudly, causing Len further agitation, at which point the group leader got up and went out in the darkness to quieten Joe (or whatever it was).

Later Joe came back into the circle. The group looked upon this episode with some amusement. In fact at various times during the evening the mushroom induced general hilarity in all members of the group. We would be seized with fits of the giggles. When one of us failed to contain them we would burst out into prolonged hoots, cackles and guffaws, which were hard to stop.

At other times, especially as the night wore on, there were long periods of complete silence, except for the chirping of the cicadas. Len continued to toss and turn, and Joe spent most of the time lying on the grass outside the light of the campfire, watched over by the dog, but the rest of us spent long periods gazing into the fire.

The fire was a conscious, intelligent being. It said, "Look at me. This is how I burn wood. Watch." The living tongues of flame danced, consuming the logs. Each flame came into existence for a short fraction of a second, but if I concentrated on capturing it in my memory as it disappeared, it seemed to me to be a living being, saying, *Hi there! Bye now!*

My vision seemed to be acute. Deep within the fire the logs glowed red. I was a guest in the fire's natural domain, it was like spending time with a good friend. The fire was clearly an expression of a larger intelligence which manifested itself throughout all of Nature. The entire natural world was quietly alive. Or - as in the case of the cicadas - not so quietly. They were obviously playing their instruments in unison, a simple and repetitive rhythm (chirp-chirp, chirp-chirp, chirp-chirp), but they were clearly having a great time, celebrating life and the awesome world in which they found themselves living.

During the long periods in which all members of the group were silent, I felt that we entered some fairly profound meditative states, such as I have more often experienced with LSD than with the tryptamine psychedelics. Consciousness was particularly lucid and refined, one might say ethereal. I felt that we were a flock of birds drifting high in the sky. All that would have been needed for consummation of the experience would have been for us to wheel over and plunge into the divine abyss, snuffed out in the blissful void, but it didn't quite happen.

Throughout much of the evening I felt the presence of the wolf spirit, and I was in contact with my own deeper self. I reflected on my life and its current situation, and on my plans for the coming nine months. I felt strengthened in my intentions and more confident that the path I was on was the right one for me.

As the effects wore off, a couple of hours before sunrise, we allowed the fire to die out, and got some sleep. We arose shortly after dawn, prepared some coffee and related to each other what had happened for us during the night. A woman friend of the group leader appeared and prepared a wonderful breakfast.

Further discussion during the day revealed that for all of us it had been a positive experience, even for Joe, who still could not make much sense of what had possessed him. Only Len had some ambivalence toward the experience, probably because it completely undermined the mechanistic-rationalist facts-and-reason-only basis on which he had conducted his life up to this point. I felt that he had much to reflect upon as a result of the night's experience, as indeed we all had, upon return to the rather strange and unnatural world of late 20th Century America.



DIARY OF A PROGRAMMER CHAPTER III

FICTION
by Carlos Rumbaut

"Welcome to Enchiridion," he says, smiling, "I'm David Engels."

I want to shout victory for finally finding something real, something concrete to blame for my condition. I have seen nothing yet that undeniably connects this place with the mental turbulence I have endured for these past few months, but I am sure this is it. I want to find out what they are up to, what they are about, what they have tried to do to me. I also want to slap this guy in front of me. The *isn't-this-great* affectation in his voice, the affable so-glad-to-see-you grin and the baby-fat face rub me the wrong way. I bet he has no idea of the suffering he and his outfit have put me through.

I don't slap him, but I do not shake his outstretched hand.

"We are a corporation, among other things," he says, unfazed by my simmering hostility. "Some of our most important research and development are conducted in this plant. We have various areas of interest, but the most intense focus relates to cybernetics research. Let me show you around."

As he leads me down a hallway with no pause in his patter I make a note of the colored, textured strips on the floor. I feel like Hansel in the forest dropping bread crumbs to secure an escape route.

"Robot leads," he explains, as if I had asked him a question about the strips. He can read my mind, I thought for a moment. On second thought I figure that he's just caught me looking at the floor. On my third and sobering thought I realize he may have the most direct access into my mind of anyone on the planet, including my psychic mother.

"We are involved in ground-breaking work in an area best described as the intersection of hardware, software, and wetware," he continues, "and we are drawing a lot of attention for it."

"From whom?" I consider myself well-read on the trade mags and I had never heard of Enchiridion.

"Our customers," Engels says, his tone of voice adding "of course". "We deal with some of the larger computer firms, as well as some

government agencies such as the Secret Service. Overseas our best customers, interestingly enough, are manufacturing companies."

We go into a large room. I have yet to see a window. There are a half dozen people at work around several desks and tables. I see key-boards, monitors, computer towers, assorted electronic peripherals. One large area of a wall catches my eye. It seems to periodically turn from a plain wall into some sort of projection screen. I can't see any source of light; it must be within the wall. A picture emerges of what I take to be neural networks. It fades away, then a microphoto of computer chip circuitry appears.

"We have a couple of projects in development here nicknamed HIS and HERS. HIS stands for Human Instruction Set, our attempt to deconstruct the basic human thought processes into their most atomic parts. HERS stands for Heuristic Entity Relationship Structures..."

"I'm familiar with the term," I cut him short. "Why the secrecy?"

"Secrecy?" He stops, mulls over an answer. "We don't think of ourselves as particularly secretive. As I mentioned, we have a variety of customers, and they keep up very closely with what we do. In fact we advertise our products and services within certain circles. I think I know what you are referring to. It's true you won't find us in the mainstream press. But every corporation creates its image and draws its veil according to its needs. We make our existence known rather selectively, and that provides us with the working room that we require."

"Look," I say, "I got into this building by chance using some special code on a state agency elevator. I've been working in that agency for five years and I never knew there was this operation adjacent to us. Why isn't it common knowledge? What makes you think I'm not going to tell everyone?" I feel my civility evaporating as my voice rises. "And what kind of experiment have you people been subjecting me to? Why was it done without my consent or even my knowledge? Do you people even know what you're doing?"

This last sentence I throw out to the faces in the room that are now all turned toward me.

Engels takes a deep breath, then says, "Please don't get upset. I am trying to explain who we are and what we do. We want to provide you with any information you want. I believe it's time you met Ms. Vega; she is leader of the

project to which you refer. She can answer your questions in that regard. This way."

Now that he has dropped the friendly voice and welcoming manner he turns all business.

"It is true," he says, "that the passage from the state agency is not commonly known. Then again, the state employees have no reason to want to come in here. Of course, certain executives and technicians are aware of the arrangement, and they respect our interests. For us, being adjacent to a large agency offers certain advantages, as we shall explain."

We walk up a flight of stairs, down a hallway, past a break room. As I glance in I see a group of workers having a lively conversation. Almost all of them wear white, with distinctive bands of color on the cuffs or at the collar. We go on, then pass through an open door into what seems from the outside to be a darkened room. Once inside, though, the room is lit and the noise from the hallway disappears. The door must consist of an electronically maintained invisible barrier. The room has windows, but blinds obstruct the outside view.

A slender woman in a white smock is looking at some printouts. Engels clears his throat to make our presence known and says, "This is Maureen Vega, project leader for TIBS."

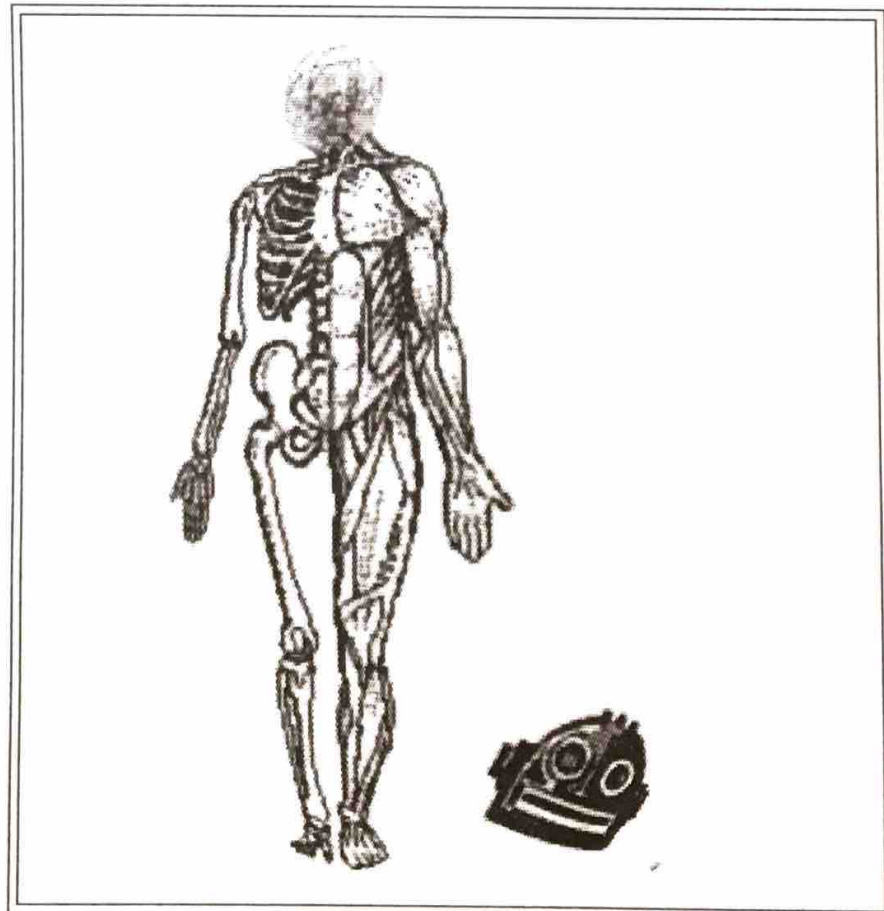
"Reen?" I ask incredulously as she turns towards us. Engels falters before introducing me, throwing a questioning glance first at her then at me.

She smiles and lowers her eyes for a second. "Yes," she says simply, "How've you been?" I take her hand briefly and our eyes meet.

I did not recognize her right off, she seemed so out of context. Was this the woman with whom I had danced years and years ago in her living room as her husband strummed flamenco chords on the guitar? Was this the dark-haired, dark-eyed waitress who bewitched me into a brief, intoxicating affair that I have always regretted?

Engels breaks in brusquely, "You know him from before? Why wasn't I told about this? Vega, I don't like it; doesn't this compromise our results?"

"No, it doesn't," she answers him immediately. "Look, I understand your concerns because I had those same concerns when we first found him. My knowing him had nothing to do with his selection. I was delighted because I knew we had found exactly what we were looking for, and I was not about to allow my previous relationship with him to derail the



project. Besides, I told Mangino everything from the start."

"I see. Well maybe I'll just take it up with her. He's yours." With that Engels turns and leaves, disappearing as he walks through the door-field.

"Office politics..." Maureen says to me apologetically, "Even in a place like this you can't get away from it."

"And just what is this place? And how did you ever wind up here?" Those are only the first two of a hundred questions popping in my mind.

"This place ... this place is incredible," she starts, with a tinge of awe in her voice. "It's cutting edge in a dozen major areas. Look, you knew me, what, ten years ago? I was a waitress, period. I knew zip about computer automata, subliminal psychology, neuro-linguistics, and various other areas that I'm now well-versed in. I got all that here with accelerated learning techniques. I'm learning more all the time, and we in Enchiridion's research arm are making fantastic discoveries. Storage media, for example: mankind is producing an exponentially increasing amount of information. Storage capacity for even small enterprises are into gigabytes and terabytes. How do we, globally, store all this data and yet have it available for easy access? The answer is we don't store it all because a lot of it is garbage or at least irrelevant. What isn't needed should be filtered out. Well, that's exactly how the human mind works. The mind turns out to be the ultimate storage medium." She is picking up steam as she talks. I have seen her intensely excited like this before, but never about anything even remotely like data storage capacity.

"I can't believe that you have been in charge of experimenting with my mind." As I say that I realize that I'm illustrating her point, throwing out all the irrelevant stuff she's saying to get to what I need to know: how I fit in.

"It does seem strange on the surface," she says, "but to me it makes perfect sense. We found a lot of psi patterns in your brain waves. Knowing you, that doesn't surprise me."

"What kind of patterns?" I find myself getting interested.

"Psi, the greek letter; let me explain. There are certain brain patterns that are produced when the mind is most receptive to storing information. When our subjects reach the mental state corresponding to these patterns, they can take in unheard-of amounts of information. But that is only the first half of the process. The second half is retrieval, and what we are inter-

ested in is enriched retrieval. That is, what is retrieved comes with a multi-dimensional set of associations pertinent to the purpose of the retrieval. You can think of it as retrieving information loaded with meaning, which as the coffee ad lady used to say, is the richest kind."

"OK, I'm intrigued. I'll shut up and listen."

"We have found that optimum enriched retrieval happens when a person produces a distinctive pattern of brain waves and concomitant physiological readings, which we call the psi pattern. This pattern is quite different from that produced in the storing phase. It is not an easy pattern to discern, and only through statistical analysis of a large enough data set did we pinpoint it. Still, the pattern was produced in the laboratory; we couldn't bank on it until we could see it produced "in the field." That field, it turned out, became your state agency. Once we fitted their desktop computers with our receivers we could eavesdrop on the brain waves of the whole place. Eventually we found subjects who produced clear and consistent psi patterns.

"It is within this group that we have been conducting research to determine what is going on mentally when the psi patterns are produced, how much creativity is involved, what reactions to external stimuli are during this state, etc. It turns out these people are what we call head-scratchers. When they reach an impasse in problem-solving where there are no obvious solutions they pause and "scratch their heads," at least figuratively. That's when we get psi patterns. Mental and physiological activity actually seems to decrease at this point, as if the subject was daydreaming. But then it shoots up suddenly. We believe enriched retrieval happens then, supplying the solution to the problem at hand. The premium head-scratcher of the group, of course, is you."

"Do you know what you put me through?" I say this to connect with the 'Reen I used to know, not the fevered clinical researcher she has turned into. "Do you know you've been driving me crazy? Do you really know what you're doing?"

"Look, I want you. We need you. You're the only one who'll do." Her words and mine are like an echo of words we exchanged ten years before. Back then what she wanted was between my legs. Now it was between my ears. I stood up, about to say something. Instead, I ran.



To be continued...

LIVING THROUGH MURDER

FICTION

by Nancy L. Smith

12-14-2002

He was late for work again. It would be the second time in a week. Broadnack would have a fit. Broadnack'd been real edgy lately.

Franklin chugged the last of his coffee substitute and set the cup in the sink. He combed the cowlick flat at the crown of his sandy-brown hair, then licked his palm and ran his damp hand over it to matte it in place.

The morning sun shined brightly through the east window indicating just how late he was. He turned the thick plastic blinds upward to block the sun's glare and breathed a deep sigh.

Franklin sat down at his computer console and threw the switch. The PC hummed as it powered up, then gave its usual message of greeting for a new day. "Good Morning. Please Enter Your User ID." Franklin typed his user identification number.

"Invalid ID" flashed the screen.

"Must've miskeyed," Franklin muttered as he typed the eight digit code a second time.

"Invalid ID," the machine came back.

His old Pentium was always doing crap like this. He was going to have to upgrade to a Super 1000. It was like he was out of sync with the rest of the world. A super 1000 was the recommended model for the net. It had artificial intelligence with voice response, his Pentium did not.

Franklin searched the bottom of his desk drawer for the folded piece of crumpled paper on which he wrote his three ID numbers. He only had a half dozen files since the ruling that no new paper would be produced, only recycled paper could be used. The list wasn't difficult to locate, and he typed his backup ID number for work.

"Invalid ID," the computer said.

Franklin glanced at the clock. Thirty minutes late already. Broadnack would never believe this. He entered his backup ID number again.

"Invalid ID."

"Forget this," he said, and entered his personal ID number.

"Invalid ID."

The whole network must be down, Franklin thought. Nobody can get on. Broadnack can't blame him for that. He would just have to wait for the system to come back up.

He sat on the sofa hunched over with his hands between his knees, staring at the blank screen. Why didn't the computer tell him when the system would be back up? What if it was down for days or weeks? How would he work? How would he order groceries or have supplies delivered? He did almost everything over the network. If the network stayed down that would mean he would have to go outside. Franklin couldn't understand why anyone would voluntarily go outside considering the rampant crime since the ozone layer decreased to almost nothing. Since the small plants burned, people would do anything to get enough food.

Franklin got up and paced his living room. Clothes, he thought. He remembered that Cy on the next houseboat sold clothes through the net. Franklin walked to the window and lifted one blind to peer out. Cy's houseboat was directly in front of him. Through the barely open slats on Cy's front window, Franklin could see Cy at his PC, a colorful sales graphic on the screen. He was connected to the net.

Franklin rushed to his PC and tried all three ID numbers again, but without success. Finally, he concluded that the net wasn't dead... he was.

He needed to report this, but without net access, how could he? A light bulb flashed over his head as he remembered something. He searched through boxes in his closet until he found an old telephone. He disconnected his internal modem and plugged the phone into the jack. He dialed 911.

"Emergency Services," the phone voice spoke.

"Is the net down?" Franklin asked.

"I'll connect you..."

"Network Troubleshooting," an electronic "voice" said.

"Is the net down?" Franklin asked again.

A pause.

"No systems problems are reported at this time."

"Then I'd like to report a murder," Franklin said.

"Voice or digital ID?"

"Digital."

"User ID please," the voice demanded.

Franklin gave the voice his personal User ID.

"Confirmed. You are not on the network," the voice said. "I will connect you."

"Detective Roget," said a high, sweet, girlish voice.

"Ah, yes." Franklin floundered. "I'm Franklin Harvey. All three of my digital ID's failed. I have two IDs for work, and one that's for

personal use. They all failed with the same error message, ID. They worked fine yesterday."

"What kind of work do you do, Mr. Harvey?" the sweet detective's voice asked.

"I have my User IDs right here. Don't you want to know what they are?"

"I believe you. You can't log onto the net. I'll check into that. Why don't you come down to the station so I can get all the details?"

"Go outside?! I never go outside."

"Yes, please. Just take the A train downtown." She hung up before he could say another word.

It was crazy to go outside. You weren't safe on the train. He could be killed just for being there.

Franklin sat on his sofa and tried to decide what to do. After a few minutes, he decided he would use the telephone again to let Broadnack know what was going on. He dialed the access number for the accounting computer and received the electronic ready/login tones.

"Mr. Broadnack," he yelled. "Mr. Broadnack, pick up vox!" The connection broke. He tried a different number.

"Mr. Broadnack, Mr. Broadnack, please pick up! It's me, Franklin Harvey."

"Harvey? Is that you? What are you up to? Why aren't you online?"

He sounded angry. Franklin heaved a deep sigh. "Mr. Broadnack, I've been killed on the net, I can't log on. I'm going to the police."

"Killed? What happened?"

"None of my User IDs work."

"That's silly. Who would do a think like that to you?"

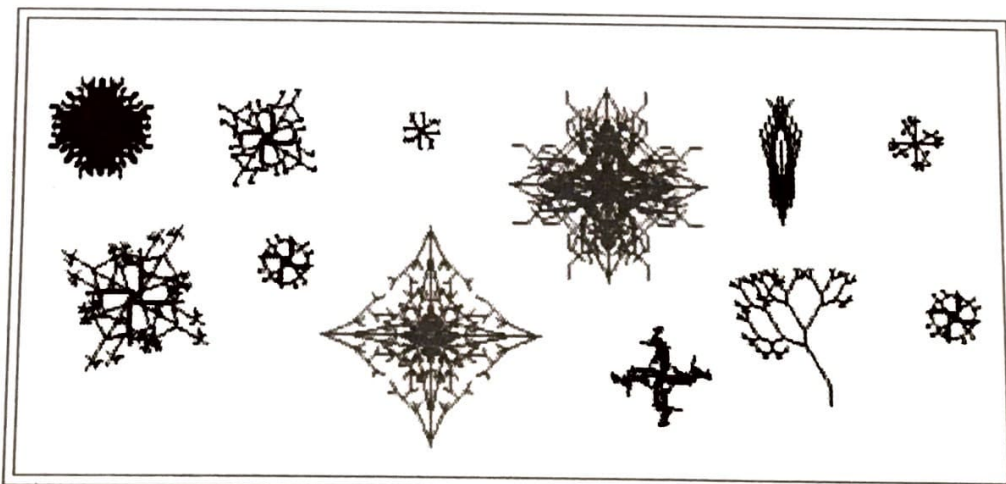
"I don't know anything yet. I better get going." He hung up.

"Who?" He shuddered. He hadn't thought about *who*. Just assumed it was a fluke or an error. Why would anyone do this to him?

Franklin put on his sunsuit. He pulled the protective pants up to his waist and slipped the jacket on. "These damn suits are another good reason not to go out. I'd move to a cooler climate like everybody else if I didn't own a houseboat," he muttered to himself. He pulled the hood over his head and face.

Franklin opened his front door and went out. He stood for several minutes at his entryway. He studied the row after row of houseboats tied to piers. The boats were all surrounded by a slightly tinted dome. It was like being in the concave of a giant lens. The boats filled his biosphere. Most were of average size, about 1500 square feet. Very little water separated one boat from the next. Only his and a few others were larger. His water plot was 3000 square feet, twice average. Not that he was rich, just that he had foresight. He and Gretel both had foresight, back then. Gretel was a veterinarian specializing in animal research and Franklin was an accountant - both could see the trends. The ozone layer was nearly depleted. Small vulnerable plants were shriveling. Fruits, vegetables, and grains turned to dust. The value of animals like cattle or deer increased. Widespread starvation was imminent. He and Gretel wanted to protect themselves and their son, Peter, so when houseboats went on sale in this strange tinted dome on the water (to minimize evaporation), they bought the largest plot they could afford. Once the plants were gone, they figured, plankton would sustain the food chain. They were right.

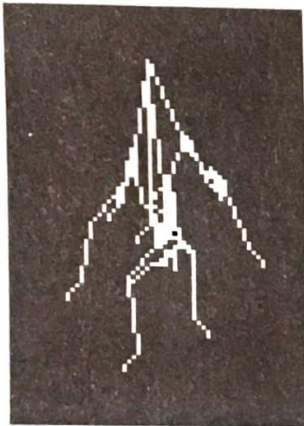
It was his good fortune that he could keep the houseboat in the divorce. Gretel fought for it, almost harder than she fought for custody of Peter. She had been vicious and mean about it. That was why it was such a surprise to him when she wanted to forgive and forget. For six months, she had been visiting unexpectedly.



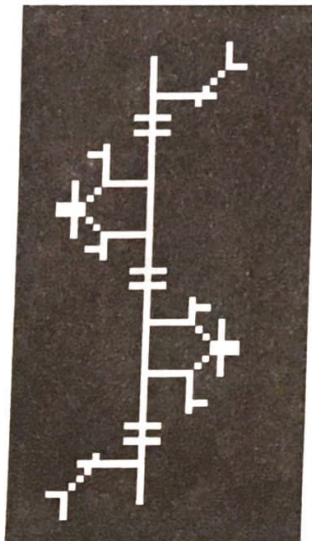
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For people who hang out on the Fringes of art, society and technology...

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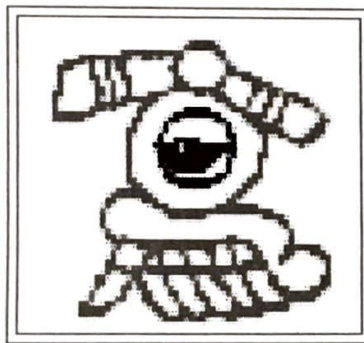
only a couple thousand \$\$ worth of equipment, working over a few months in spare time. BUT, it costs about \$5-10K to launch a retail software package today and even then the middlemen take



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Talking about the *Fringe vis-a-vis Mainstream* in cyberculture... one happy customer sez: "It's kinda like corral reefs: the whole structure seems pretty, but mostly dead — meanwhile all the Life is out on the Edge." It's been that way for a long time, and will probably continue. So let's go find the Fringes!

$1/e^2$

The **FringeWare** electronic mailing list provides an open forum for people to discuss DIY issues, how-to-build things, weird science, etc. 'Tis moderated/digested so you don't have to worry about too much electronic junk mail in your virtual PO box. To join the list or to send a message, email to:

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Simple brain machine that Timothy Leary calls "The LSD flight simulator." Combines breath work with strobed sunlight to stimulate visual mind candy.

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DOS software to track your circadian rhythms, ask psych profile questions for color prefs, adjective pairs, melody prefs, etc. Then it runs sessions during your "down" times, like a psychoactive screen saver, to nix stress.

Timewave Zero
\$55 ..by Dolphin Software

DOS software implementing Terence McKenna's fractal wave describing Novelty through a theory of time, history & the end of history, based on I Ching & Mayan calendar.

Mayan Calendrics
\$55 ..by Dolphin Software

DOS software to correlate between Maya and Western dates.

EnviroAccount
\$29.95 ..by EnviroAccount Software

DOS software to analyze your person environmental impact, "in excruciating detail." RU an Eco-Tyrannosaurus?

WorldLink
\$21.95 ..by InterCon

DOS/Mac software to connect with a worldwide Internet service. Includes manual & 1 month free subscription. Requires PSI pops. Great for traveling cyborgs.

Cyber Rag III
Electronic Hollywood II
\$6 each ..by Jaime Levy

Mac electronic zines from a premiere techno-punk zinester. Mondo 2000 #7 review sez: "Angst animations, premenstrual poetry, rambunctious reviews, seductive sound samples" as well as subversive hacker info for all.

Digital Psychic
\$14.95 ..by Jeff Posey

DOS software for digital seances. "Requires VGA graphics, mouse and a relaxed state of mind." Kewl pix of Stonehenge for your visual/psychic pleasure.

Matrix News
\$2.50 ..by MIDS

Latest news, charts and tables full of info about the Matrix: Internet + Fidonet + BITNET, etc. Learn how it's put together.

PowerGlove
\$42 ..by Mattel

Mattel's ultra low-end VR device for 3D input to your computer. Used and new models - subject to availability.

SimLife
\$59.95 ..by Maxis

Mac software for ALife video games. Design your beasts then let them frolic. One of the weirdest, hottest selling new "games" released.

Starlight Vision
\$1395 (scope), \$1200 (hand-held)
..by former KGB supplier

Night vision hardware imported from Russia. Shifts infrared to green, then amplifies 50k-90k times. New w/ 1 yr factory warranty. 1.3 kg, 36 cm, 9v battery. Automatic shutoff switch, leather case, daylight cover.

TextureSynth
\$149 ..by Pantechonicon

Mac software for a visual image synthesizer that creates incredible color textures. Give your virtual landscapes computer generated textures that look creepily real. Check out review in Mondo 2000 #6.

Innerquest
\$250 ..by Psychic Engineering

High-end brain machine w/ LED goggles & stereo phase distorted WalkMan builtin. 16 preprogrammed routines. PXN sez try #4 for kicks. We almost don't wanna part with these cuz they're too fun at our parties. Previously owned by Lawrence Sergic, MD.

FRED13
\$199.95 ..by Robitron Software

Natural language one-liner dialog generator AI. Used for the FRED13 topic of the "mondo" conference on the WELL. DOS or Unix. Call about source license.

FRED13 demo
\$43 ..by Robitron Software

Same as above but can't learn any new phrases; has 12000 phrase/response records, enough to hold a pretty loose conversation. Great for intelligent agents on a BBS.

Flux Oersted Tapes
\$7 ..by Robitron Software

"Music from the fringes of the electromagnetic field." Subversive, computer augmented mind candy songs recorded by FringeWare's own "robitron" aka Flux Oersted.

Space/Time Fabric Hats
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Reversible piecework floppy hats w/ recycled electronics & FringeWare logo. People will think you speak a "different" language, regardless of where you go.

Sterling Cigarette Holders
\$25 ..by Rolling Thunder

Sterling silver cigarette holders, just like Uncle Duke uses. 15 cm long, beveled lip. Specify polished or oxidized.

Menstat 2.0
\$99 ..by Sudona

Fertility planning software for Windows or Macintosh. Lunar calendar, herbalism hypertext database. Based on neural nets. Check out Susie Bright's review in Future Sex #2.

Beyond Cyberpunk! stack
\$29.95 ..by The Computer Lab

Multimedia tour-de-force of art, literature, thought and practice in a cyberpunk genre. Requires HyperCard: kewlest stack on the planet & our fastest selling item.

Beyond Cyberpunk! combi
\$1 ..by The Computer Lab

Kata Sutra's continuing cyber-heroine sagas in Neo-Wobblie Land.

Expanded Books:
Neuromancer series
Complete Annotated Alice
Jurassic Park
Complete Hitchhiker's Guide
\$19.95 each ..by The Voyager Company

Mac software for electronic versions of popular novels with illustrations & hypertext links added. Requires: System 6.0.7 or later w/ 31 cm or larger monitor, HyperCard 2.1, 1.4MB disks.

Gold Brick Nugget
\$169 ..by Transfinite Systems

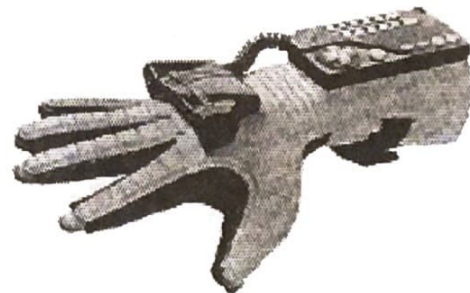
Macintosh hardware & software that translates game peripherals to substitute for the mouse. Includes Hypercard stack for 3D input and C source to write your own drivers. Mattel PowerGlove, Nintendo Zapper, Broderbund Uforce, etc. Powered from ADB port.

PC Patterns
\$150 ..by Water Fountain Software

DOS software to edit & print libraries of custom clothing patterns. US sizes 8-48 included; custom measurements can be saved & edited.

Blind Watchmaker
\$10.95 ..by WW Norton

Evolutionary "biomorph" software for DOS & Macintosh, based on the Richard Dawkins book. We use these ALife wares to illustrate zines.



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She said she wanted to make amends for Peter's sake.

Franklin walked down the pier to the bus stop. The bus took him outside the biosphere to the train station. He had only a few minutes to wait until the next train downtown.

Once inside the train, he took off his headgear. It felt like 120 degrees inside his sunsuit, and he was sweating too much. His water ration was low. Some on the train took off their headgear, too, and it was easy to see how simple it would be to get away with a mugging or a homicide wearing a sunsuit.

He couldn't see his assailant on the net, either. *Who?* He kept wondering... *who?*

At the police station, he met Detective Roget. Like her voice, she was small and perky, with short, sandy hair the same color as his own, and attentive gray eyes. She seemed likable, someone he could trust. She smiled and touched both of her hands to his when they shook.

"So," she paused. "What have you figured out so far?"

Franklin wondered if that was why she made him come downtown, to give him time to think. "'What' is a lot easier than 'who'" he said. "I only have access to one thing over the net that anyone else would want - other people's accounts."

"What type of accounts do you handle?"

"All kinds, some silver and gold, but those aren't worth much, deer and fresh-water fish in this area, beef from the west, crab and saltwater fish from the coast."

"Do you have many plankton accounts?"

"Six, including my own." Detective Roget sat up straighter.

A uniformed policeman hovered at the door interrupting their conversation.

"Yes?" she asked.

"I finished the trace. All of his accounts are empty, and it does appear that his own User ID was used, then deleted."

"Looks bad, huh," Detective Roget said. "Did you know that starvation is the number one cause of human death? It's higher than heart disease, higher than homicide, higher than anything." She looked Franklin in the eyes. "So, you handled six plankton accounts, including your own. Isn't it odd that an accountant would make enough to buy a plankton account?"

Franklin jumped up from his chair. "Now wait a minute. I didn't do this." He paced the office like a caged panther. "You think I did this. I didn't, I swear I didn't."

Detective Roget smiled and said, "You can leave now."

Franklin ran for the door, but couldn't pass because of the police officer standing there.

"Here," he said, handing Franklin a slip of paper.

Franklin looked at the eight-digit code written on the clean, white sheet.

"It's a temporary ID. You can use this to log in until everything is worked out." The officer smiled like a discount salesman.

Franklin glared at the policeman's grin for a minute, stuffed the paper in his pocket, and walked out.

Franklin had been sitting at his PC for days looking through open records. He could inquire into just about anything, travel reservations, public utility records, birth and death notices. He had gone through the investment and banking records of every person he could think of each day looking for large deposits or withdrawals. He didn't find anything strange until today. Broadnack transferred all his puny personal accounts to "Thad Wipple." It didn't take long to discover that Thad was the son of Broadnack's deceased cousin. Thad was desperately poor, living off his Electronic Benefits Transaction card for welfare in the northern New England states. Franklin couldn't find any

travel or telephone files indicating that Broadnack had seen or heard from Thad in over ten years.

Franklin wanted to check this out. He put on his sunsuit and paid a surprise visit to Broadnack. It took Broadnack several minutes to answer the door when Franklin rang the bell.

"Harvey," Broadnack's smile was disarming. "You've come for a visit." He stumbled as he moved to one side so that Franklin could enter.

Broadnack's house was filthy, his clothes were in disarray, and he was flat drunk. It seemed inconsistent with the orderly facade Broadnack had always presented in the past.

"Your house always look like this?" Franklin asked.

"You wouldn't know, would you? You've never been here before, have you?" Broadnack sat in an over-stuffed chair and began to bawl.

"What's with you?" Franklin asked quietly, trying to disguise his annoyance at Broadnack's state.

"Did you come to say you're sorry?" Broadnack asked.

"Say what?"

Broadnack's round, puffy face grew red. His eyes grew wide. He stood and jolted menacingly close to Franklin. "It's your fault. I was just barely holding on, then you go and get robbed. My business is bankrupt. You! You put me out of business." He plopped despairingly back into his chair.

"I'm sorry." Franklin really wanted to apologize. He hadn't thought about how Broadnack might have been affected. He'd only worried about himself.

"Today's my birthday. I'm sixty." Broadnack started crying softly again.

"Happy Birthday," Franklin said. "Really."

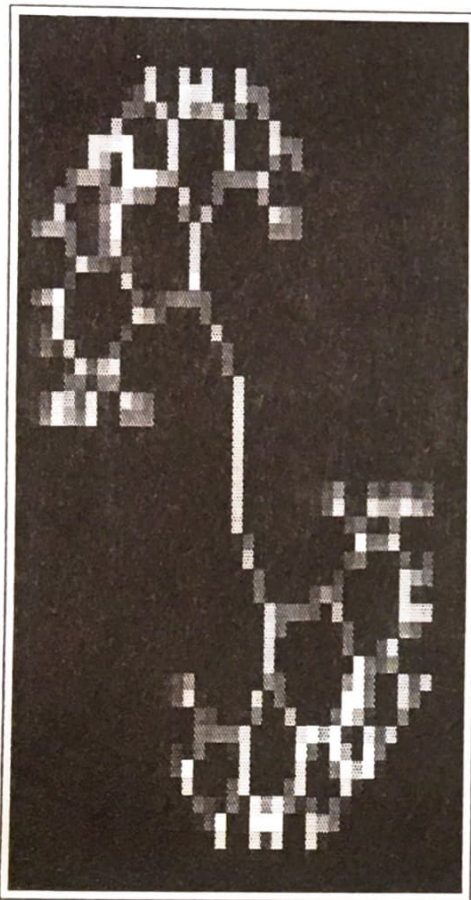
"When I was a kid, I always had a party. Balloons, cake, friends came over." Broadnack picked up his bottle of Seagram's VO and took a swallow, gulping as it went down. Franklin noticed that it was the real thing, not synthetic. It must have cost him the last of his business proceeds. "No more parties, no more friends, no more birthdays."

"Don't you have some relatives you could invite over?" Franklin baited Broadnack.

"I have one living relative. Thad. He'll like me *real well* soon enough."

"Why is that?"

"Just you wait and see." Tears rushed to Broadnack's already cloudy eyes.



The doorbell rang, causing both Broadnack and Franklin to jump. Broadnack struggled to get out of his chair.

"I'll get it," Franklin said. He went and opened the door. Detective Roget.

"What're you doing here?"

"You left your house. You never leave your house."

"He didn't do it. His business has failed. I think he's suicidal."

"What about Thad Wipple?"

"That was just part of putting things in order." Franklin took her by the arm. "Let me handle this, please." He led her back into the living room. "Look. This is my friend..."

"Anne," she filled in.

"Anne. She's come to celebrate your birthday with us."

Anne smiled. "Happy Birthday, Mr. Broadnack. I'm so pleased to be here."

Franklin believed it.

Broadnack beamed. "Bernard. Folks used to call me BB. Would a pretty lady like you call me BB?"

"BB. I'd like to take Mr. Harvey downtown to look at holograms of some known felons. Would you like to come? I have some friends who would like to talk to you too."

"You're a police officer." Broadnack looked confused.

"Anne's a detective. She's helping us find out who did this."

"Yes." Anne looked straight into Broadnack's fat face. "BB, we really could use your help."

Broadnack nodded with his tongue hanging out like an old lap dog.

Broadnack and Franklin piled into Anne's police car. She drove a few blocks, then stopped at a store and bought Broadnack a birthday treat. After that, he seemed quiet and happy.

As they entered her office, the police officer from Franklin's last visit stepped out of a large room filled with computer equipment. He motioned for Anne and she moved close to him. They talked for a few minutes, then both approached Franklin and Broadnack.

"I don't think we'll need to look at those holos now." Anne said. "Officer Pierson says that some of the missing accounts have shown up."

Franklin smiled in relief. "Oh? Where?"

"In your checking account, Mr. Harvey, but..."

"I knew all along it was you. I always thought you were a lazy screw-up, Harvey." Franklin saw Broadnack's fist coming fast and hard toward his face.

Fingers lightly touched his forehead brushing away a stray lock of hair.

"Gretel," he mumbled confused for a moment. Gretel loved to brush her fingers across his temple and through his hair. She would kiss his eyes, his cheeks, his lips...

He realized she was not there and felt the hollowness all over again. He was alone.

He opened his eyes and saw his steel bars. He was in a jail cell. He sat up too fast and rolled his aching head back down into his hands.

"Mr. Harvey."

He saw Anne sitting on a chair beside his cot. He rubbed his stiff jaw. "Is it blue?" he asked. "I've never been in a fight before. Do I have something to show for it?"

"You haven't been in a fight yet, and yes, it's a lovely shade of violet." She paused. "Tell me about Gretel," she said. "What happened?"

"It was like we wandered into a long tunnel. I held her hand trusting her so vulnerably, so innocently at first, but she let go of my hand. When I came out of the tunnel, I was alone."

"And angry."

"Angry and bitter."

"And now?"

"Now I'm still alone, but not so innocent. I haven't trusted anyone in a very long time."

"Maybe you're still in that tunnel?"

"Maybe."

Anne made an official face. "I have to ask you some questions."

Franklin nodded.

"Who else might have access to your User IDs?"

"No one."

"Did you memorize them, or did you write them down?"

"For an accountant, I'm not very good at remembering numbers."

"Where did you keep them?"

"On the houseboat, in my desk."

"And," she glanced at a scrap of paper, "is this your checking account number, 48758265?"

"That was mine and Gretel's joint account, but we closed that account years ago."

"Who has come to visit you on your houseboat in, say, the last six months?"

"Only Gretel and Peter." Franklin didn't like the direction of the conversation. "You don't think that Gretel did this?"

"You haven't seen the news today," she said.

"No." He shook his head.

"A team of noted veterinarians, including your ex-wife, have identified a cure for a virus which endangered the plankton crop."

"Oh no! Will there be another famine?" Franklin's eyes grew wide in panic.

"No, there's no danger now. But six months ago..." She let her words trail off.

"Gretel would do anything to protect Peter and avoid starvation." He stared blankly at the gray, mildewed wall. "I would have given her the money," he said, more to himself than to Anne. "For Peter," he added. He looked at Anne. "She's still so angry."

"I got police work to do. Why don't you get some rest." Anne patted his hand and left him in the jail cell.

He spent the night staring at the ceiling or pacing the floor. Sleep seemed impossible. In the morning, Anne came into the cell and sat in the chair by the cot.

"She's confessed," Anne said softly.

"How did you get her to do that?"

"I asked her." Anne smiled. "I ran into her at a bar she likes to frequent. She was a little tipsy and very regretful. She didn't want to hurt you again."

"She sold off some of the accounts and moved them into our joint checking account, is that right?" Franklin asked.

Anne drew his attention into her eyes. "And she transferred some of the money using your name."

"Why?"

"Peter has been sick and was in the hospital. He needed a lot of expensive tests her insurance didn't cover."

Franklin jumped up in alarm. "What is it? Do you know?"

"Something with his colon. Comes from having no fiber in his diet. He's fine now, but that's why she dipped into the money so soon."

Franklin's blood raced as she spoke. He was anxious to see his son.

"He's at home," Anne said. "And you're not charged with anything, so you're free to go."

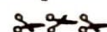
Franklin bolted out of the cell and down the hall. He stood at the open door without exiting, feeling like he'd forgotten something, or left something undone.

"Is something wrong?" Anne came up behind him.

"I have to go now, but later would you go out to dinner with me?"

"You never go out."

"I'll make an exception."



NUDE WALKING

FICTION

by Phil Coleman

Naked I walk down the sidewalk. It is night in my neighborhood in this small city. The air is cool. It is fresh and feels good as it circulates around parts of my body normally bundled and encumbered by clinging clothes during the day.

I have been nude walking several nights now. Admittedly the first time I stepped out I wore shoes, and I only walked a few doors away before I turned back. The past few nights I have walked naked around the block several times and then come home.

Tonight I walk across the street for the first time. This puts me more in the open. It causes me to walk into the street. Instead of rounding the corners at the end of the sidewalk, I stroll right out into the intersection.

I do not get the charge I thought I would. Sure it is lighter, more open. But the light is artificial,

isn't it? The openness is man-made, too. It is not natural. Besides, once you step outside naked there is really nothing else. Being totally myself, uncovered and bold, is the ultimate. It becomes its own constant. Nakedness is an irrefutable fact. You can't improve on it.

All I can say about walking across the street is that it extended my route. I felt the coarser surface of the blacktop.

The surface of the ground is the first thing you notice while nude walking. It is cool and hard and unyielding in the night. I compensate for that by walking swiftly. I roll the surface of my foot, heel-arch-toe, against the hardtop in a smooth stride. Then I concentrate on swinging my arms until these movements, the heel-toe and the arm-swinging, become natural.

When I was a small boy living in a large city, I walked to school. I remember the uncaring environment, the impersonal cars driving down the boulevard, the street cars clanging along the tracks. I remember the relentless noise and the prevailing aroma of rust everywhere. The skies were grey, mirroring the concrete below.

One day while walking to school a grey two-door Chevy slowed down along the curb. I remember vividly its early fiftyish squat, bulbous appearance. I remember the man driving it.

He was watching me, but I tried to ignore him. I found that difficult because no one in this urban chaos noticed me.

"Come on," he finally said, after coasting slowly next to the sidewalk. "Come on and get in. Let's go for a ride. Come on."

I shook my head, too startled to say anything, yet knowing somehow that I didn't need to speak. All I needed to do was keep walking and, true to early instruction, ignore this grey man, this grey unsmiling older-than-my-father man. This stranger.

So I shook my head again, looking straight ahead, and continued my schoolboy pace, maybe walking a little faster, a little more forthrightly, and not looking at the grey intruder.

After that, I was more content with my aloneness during these walks. I began even to prefer the solitude at other times as well. I had prevailed, walking straight ahead.

Eversince, though, I wondered what it might have been like to have gotten in the car.

The neighborhood is empty when I walk. Not that it matters in this area of small businesses and occasional apartment houses. Most people

have gone home. The old people who inhabit the apartments stay inside at night.

I am out again tonight. I will walk around the block again. Last night, walking across the street was fine, but I had overrated my preconception.

A woman approaches me. She stares straight at me. She is the only person I have seen so far in my nude strolls. Her arm is outstretched.

She holds a rolled-up newspaper in it, pointing it at me. As she nears me, she slaps it against the open palm of her other hand. She slaps it harder as she passes me.

Last night I saw the purple light again in a dream. Actually it is more of a purple fluid, yet with a luminous quality.

(I am reluctant to write this. Do people talk about their dreams and meditative experience like they used to describe their drug trips? And aren't they just as boring?)

But I do sense a significance to this occurrence beyond the experience. I'm not sure what it is, but it's fitting to note so that if and when it becomes fulfilling I can refer back to it. Call it a potential personal "I told you so."

The purple radiates, pulsates in and around my third eye. I suppose this is rather common. It spins and churns, achieving almost a spiral effect. It is quite pleasant, really.

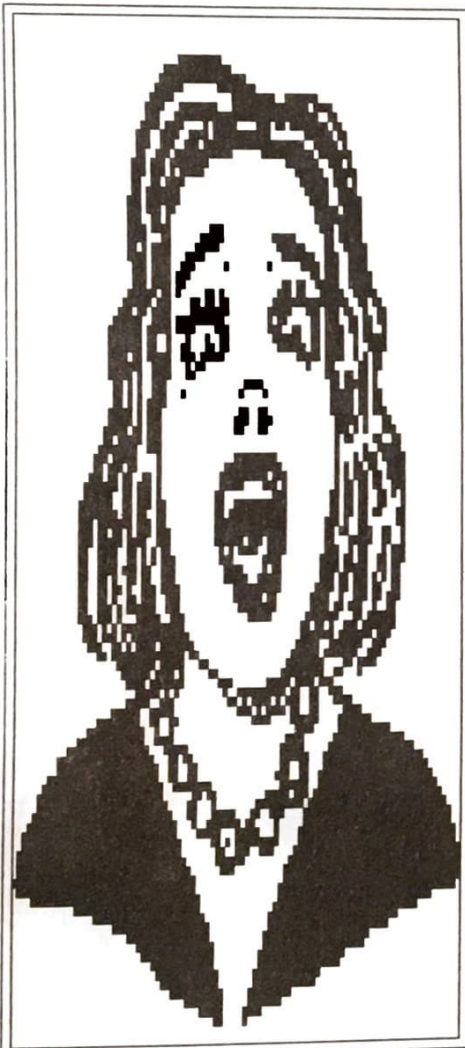
This time I entered the purple. It got so large, I could not help it. Actually I'm not sure whether I went inside it, or it engulfed me. I suppose that doesn't matter. Before I knew it, I was in the purple hue and it was swimming all around me. It was calming and peaceful. I felt strangely energized all day.

I suppose it is appropriate that I see few people while walking. I walk naked at night for myself, not to shock or surprise others. If I wanted to astound, I'd walk during the day.

Tonight the air is so sweet you can almost taste it. What ecstasy!

I see bodies in the shadow of a doorway of one of the apartments. I am walking quickly as usual, but I slow down involuntarily to see clearly. Funny, I might be the attraction out here, but I am the one curious to see them.

Although it is very dark in the doorway, I see enough to understand why they do not see me. It is a couple, one (taller) standing, leaning, against the doorway wall. The other, apparently a woman with long hair, is pressed up against the taller one. Now I notice they rub their leather-clad bodies against one another. He leans against the wall, holding her and



rhythmically rubbing himself against her. Her in a tight leather skirt. He in black leather pants and jacket. Her with long black hair, chin tilted back. He now moving his hands up and down her backside. They don't notice me.

Walking naked as the college celebrity radical. The "F." in his name stood for "fuck." He stood for Freedom of Speech and For everything the administration stood Against.

After a resoundingly boring speech about Freedom of Expression, Jefferson introduced Adam, who unceremoniously stripped, showing a small white body. He then ran in dance-like steps, tight-lipped, all around The Green. Until the cops, equally tight-lipped, came to drive him away.

It was then that we realized Adam had an "Eve." His girlfriend, in an act of solidarity, stripped also. The cops took her, too.

Naked outside at night. I walk quickly, not because I am afraid someone will see me, but because my sheer swiftness defines me. My movement through the night air gives me purpose, and, like meditation (or dreaming?), it is a purpose in and of itself. There is no purpose in the future, only hopes and fears.

A car drives by. I scarcely notice it, so engrossed am I in the evening air and the pleasure of the walking. Otherwise the streets are quiet. The sidewalks are mine. I move briskly, swing my arms, much like those power walkers you see in the mornings in those residential neighborhoods.

I hear a car engine behind me. Out of the corner of my eye I see a grey car. Was it the one that passed by earlier? It slows beside me and paces me. I realize now how fast I have been walking. I am slightly out of breath.

The car lights up the street and sidewalk with revolving multi-colored lights on its roof. Purple whirls around with red and yellow. I keep walking.

"Care to get in? Let's go back to your building and get some clothes on, ok, Adam?"

The voice comes from a young man with a grey uniform. I've seen him before, it seems, but I can't remember where. I'm not sure he was wearing that uniform before. Strange, but I feel unhurried now. I am well within myself as I walk.

I am free. Free to choose. Free to walk. Free to stop and, this time, get in the car.

✂✂✂

WOODSIDE

NOTFICTION by pacoid

Sequestered deep within the sanctified halls of higher education, young larvae of the Rich gather for inculcation and pre-mating rituals. These rites psychosexually reinforce the inherent cultural trance and perpetuate socialistic Fourth-Circuit activation for the emerging hive mentality. Class war stress artifacts result as these groups physically and intellectually commingle with Fifth- or Sixth-Circuit representatives who have been included in the population for academic diversity.

Such artifacts tend to erupt with a violence not unlike that witnessed as tectonic plates collide in the scalding sea birth of a volcanic island, or as a space launch vehicle ignites to catapult its orbital capsule into the void. For instance:

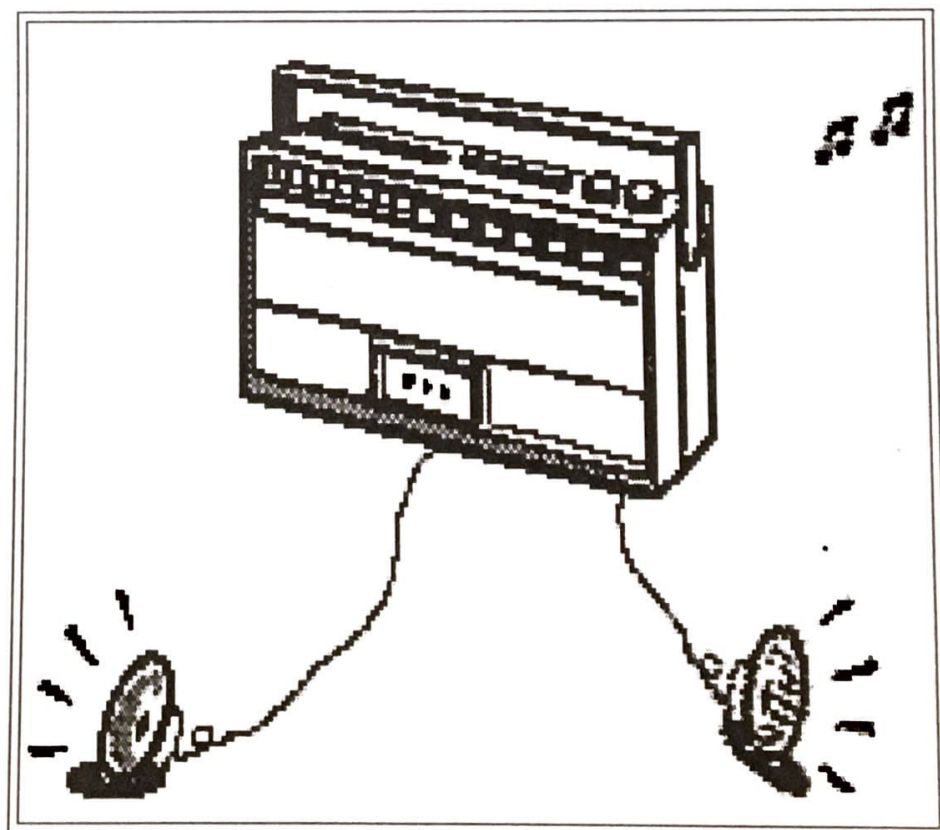
"Paco, just wanted to let you know that I didn't need your weak tit grief last night! There is NEVER a reasonable excuse to assault another person especially when it is totally unprovoked. You made a fool out

of yourself acting like something out of a Rambo movie, and that didn't jibe at all with your otherwise very cool and amiable personality. I don't expect an apology and I don't expect you to take this as offensive on my part. Just think about it."

— Charles, 6/12/86

What a crock of shit. Attention, stand by for launch. "Jibe?" T minus 16 and counting. And she was sweating thighingly and giggling. T minus fifteen seconds to launch. Eventually, the mere presence of the cult word produces the verdict, the Group is right. Launch director to Area Five. It is the Only way... T minus fourteen seconds. However, the very next step is usually to convince the recruits that scientific logic can be used to prove their validity. Clear launch ramp. Open up in there...

So it was the last night of the school year, and the end of six fucking long years of college, and the movers were cumming at five am to haul all the shit to Jersey. I'd had about three bottles of vodka with Jim and it was only ten but the asshole RA down the hall decided to have a last minute party on this one night in all of History,



even though he always fucking canned all our VH & Gandhi & gin & tonic vomit parties because of the, and I goddamn quote, "lack of intellectual content" but we all knew that he was only trying to get laid nicely for once, so as to impress potential prey, and in fact we even walked in and took pictures of the little fuck one night while he was humping the RA from Long Island upstairs.

Woodside. The man we called Woodside. I fucking beg to differ.

So Woodside wanted to party for the first stinking time since iguanas crawled onto Easter Island and I only needed to sleep so it was time to Compromise. Send in the destruct signal. T minus 3 seconds. I do care about my cuntry. So I was laying there naked in the June swelter, but I slipped on a loose robe with Johnson slapping every which way in the wind and sauntered down the hall to Parley with Woodside.

Because he hated the name. It was his rival school and that kind of fuck cares about that kind of high school shit. Charlie-Something-Fucking-Or-Other-The-Third, but we called him Woodside. So I says, "Woodside, can you turn the toons down a little?" It would've been fine, but it was trash toons, that putrid kind of sterile machine beatbop shit that freshman wenches like because Woodside was only trying to get laid pretty for once, he wanted some young juicy, the kind that's tight and don't smell nowadays rancid and gets sooooo excited that you just hafta cream inside it. And he wanted it bad, and it was almost leaving all ready to go cum home for the whole summer and he needed it fast before the year was finally over, six fucking long years of school for me, but just another nice summer for the young juicy to go cum home, so Woodside needs to hurry so he put on the sick toons that young juicy like to wiggle with but he didn't have enough speaker cord.

Alas, it Wasn't Long Enough for him to party with those lithe little musks out on the veranda so he put on the sick toons and cranked the system up from his room to just serenade that young juicy out all the way on the veranda. So I said:

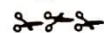
"Please turn it down a little, Woodside, cause it's sick toons, the kind that only young juicy enjoy, and you'll never get young juicy, asshole." But he begs to differ... DIFFER ON MY HEAD!! But he differed and then said he had to crank it to get all the fucking way out to reach the veranda. And besides, he says, it's "Time to Party." So I tried, I tried. I tried harder

than Johnson even on a real good night, the kind of night when there's tight sweet musk all spread all over my dirty sheets, long and thin with beautiful hair all spread out all over my stained sheets and she's just crying and sobbing but I can't stop and that's HOW FUCKING HARD I TRIED, I tried, I said "Okay Woodside," cause he hates the name Woodside, "Okay Woodside, you wanna Party, so I cum here to Party," and I faked a kick into his groin and Johnson goes swinging wildly and all the young juicy is getting really scared and excited and starts squealing all over the place and while Woodside is lurching back up against a wall trying to figure what's happening with this one foot jabbing broadside into his puny crotch and why he's not making sick slurping noises inside some young little juicy rather than having a man attack him, I say "Okay Woodside, you fucking want to Party so let's Party, dammit!"

And while I fake with my one leg, I stumble, pivot to crash thru the speakers with my other leg, the ones in his room because it Wasn't Long Enough to reach the sick toons all the way to the young juicy just wanting and sweating and woobly wiggling on the veranda, so the tweeter falls out pitifully and the little young juicy have their eyes just glaring and I grab a rubber raft out in the hall cause there's all these Frats nearby with all these rich cocks and all these Sororities with all those filthy rich musks just pungent and oozing all around the Frats, just hoping to land some rich cock, oh I beg to differ, and they have all these little rich fuck kinda orgies out on the lake behind the dorm and the Frats all oozing and and and all the wannabes at the dorm such as the young juicy just glaring at me now pretending to be rich fucks and so they have these rafts to join the rich cockplay out on the lake.

And so I grab a big raft nearby that some young juicy had just used that day to fucking flirt like a waitress with some rich cock and I throw it onto the bewildered Woodside who doesn't understand why he's not ready to just cum inside one of those young clean little juicy that's dancing to the sick toons and be squeezing her ass to try and get what he's after and trying to reach it and squeezing to reach it cause he needs it soooo badly and instead the young juicy all staring and blinking at him trying to wiggle out from under the big rubber raft and wiggling to the sick toons and me screaming in rhythm and waving a chair at his head and threatening to call the cops and file molestation charges if he does anything funny and the little pungent musks are glaring at me and Johnson

is going *wag, wag, wag* just wiggling with the sick toons while the young juicy all stare and I start screaming nowards at Woodside and saunter back down to my room and he wants to cum after me and the young little musks cum after him and the music is dying sickly as the sick toons squeal through the dead little speakers that I squeezed from their boxes cause I needed something more and Woodside is glaring and the other RA's grab him and the one RA from Long Island that we found him humping cums up to me and hits me with her FUCKING PURSE and says something stupid with a look in her swarthy eyes like she'd wanna fuck me instead and Woodside says I'm "unrational" and I says "Noways, Woodside, I just want to Party" and he says "Stop calling me Woodside" and I say I'D RATHER SLIT YOUR FUCKING THROAT THAT TO TAKE ANY SHIT FROM YOU and the RA's are holding him back and Woodside is being bewildered and blood is gushing to his brains and he's turning red and screaming and the little juicy all stare and wonder and the RA from Long Island is startin' to dribble sweat thighingly and Jim cums by and says "YOU'RE SO WEIRD!" and Jim is God and God is Jim and the little juicy all want to cum up and say "Hi, so you speak French?" and Woodside screams "Don't call me Woodside!" and the other RA's are holding him back chuckling and telling me that violence is the last resort of the incompetent and giggling about it and acting all foolish like dipshits who don't understand what they've just said and I'm mumbling something to the RA from Long Island and making little sick gestures about her blinking and the blood is gushing to her brains and she's turning all red and all flushed looking and Jim is busting a nut on the morbid sight and screaming his little lungs out with laughter about all these dumb fucks and the sick little squeezed tweeters die painfully and the the the tender young juicy is just getting all excited and dribbling thighingly too and the blood is gushing to their heads, but Johnson you see, Johnson is just swinging in the wind and humming his own little sick toons.



WARTIME

FICTION

by Jerod Pore

0530: I walked to "work" through the hot, muggy streets of San Antonio. The near intolerable air was often punctuated with the graceful roars of the new F-23 Phoenix fighter/bombers soaring to sorties over rebel-held territories in southern Mexico or Guatemala, or the People's Republic of Belize, or targets with names too new to be disseminated to one of my rank. May they crash into the glass towers of Christianity, Inc. in Dallas.

0600: The dawn burned through the gutted interior of what were once the offices of some minor division of a now nationalized oil company. About half the lights were strung along extension cables for the sudden and short, yet never completed, construction work. The lifts did not function. I climbed the twelve flights to my office, the stairs shaking with each wing of F-23's that passed overhead. Each door was color coded to denote a level of security no longer enforced. All able personnel were either fighting in the far-flung police actions and civil wars from the Philippines and Indonesia to Pakistan and Iran, Lebanon and South Africa, Guatemala, Belize, Surinam, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Brazil and the volatile, temporary nation-states that were declared almost daily on practically every continent; or they were observing and suppressing the constant, pointless "actions" in and around consulates, weapons depots, arms manufacturers and other building blocks of the military-industrial complex. This time of morning there were no other officers in the building, so strict military form was not required of me.

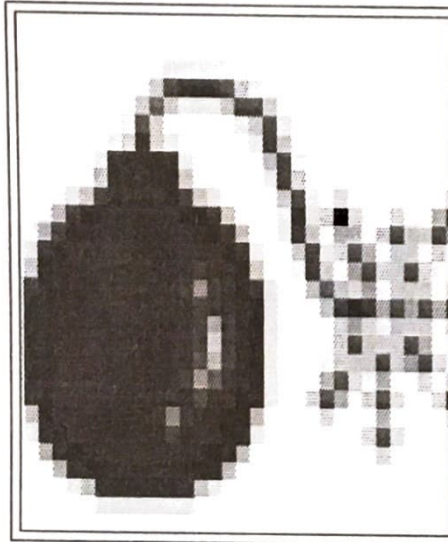
With security gone, the building was again populated by office workers. Only our involuntary job descriptions and the color of our uniforms differentiated us from the occasional faded photograph and other ghosts of corporate raiders and secretaries.

0630: Logged on, checked mail and messages, then hard copy. The upper brass were not at all pleased with my latest maps. I had designated US and Allied occupied areas in red with blue lettering, Nationalist/Insurgent areas in green with orange lettering. The effect was a subliminal headache.

The gestalt of the graphic was passable enough. I switched the color scheme and resubmitted the copy. I realized that I must be more careful, as I desired popular acceptance of my work. I crawled under my desk to juggle plugs, outlets, power boards, and surge protectors to get my tape deck to work without blowing a fuse in my office.

0845: "Mornin' Captain." From a courtesy born of alienation I turned down the boom box. Out of a courtesy born of intimidation the Lieutenant did not procure one of his own or bring in his own tapes to play. Still I looked for clues as to why he was in a support sector instead of a combat sector.

The odds were too long that he, too, had epilepsy or some other subtle physical ailment



that made him unsuitable for killing. More likely his psychological makeup was substandard.

So fucking complacent. One day he'd get pissed and go over my head about some minor infraction that's major enough to cause me hell. I assigned him shitwork and popped a Birthday Party tape into the box.

Hands up! Who wants to die??

"How can you listen to that stuff so early in the morning?" he asked. Something was amiss, as he usually suffered in silence.

"Have you heard how Sonny's burning?" I found it nostalgic, in an odd way. It reminded me of a time when living on the edge was a demented fantasy and not a harsh reality. When the fall was just a vague fantasy that was never meant to be fulfilled. Besides, I'd been here since 0600:

"I didn't think you were so dedicated?"

"Like some bright erotic star I am dedicated to my craft, not a political fiction. That is why I, though younger than you, am a captain who sends reports to generals to decide who, where, when and how to kill," I rise to his baiting. Perhaps I've been putting in too many hours. I can cruise on determination, but the cost is high.

FLAME ON! FLAME ON!

"Then why don't you..."

"Protest? I'm far too cynical. Besides, by being arrested and jailed I add credence to the need to defend one tyranny against another. To fight the long, slow, steady battle strengthens the opponent."

And he gives off such an evil heat "I see."

"The troops with their hard-rocking patriotism await your reports, Lieutenant. They need to know what rations they will have tomorrow, and what price the beans in beaner blood..."

Warming the damp and rotten seed, The Lieutenant saluted smartly and marched to his cubicle. I would work late again tonight to make his reporting to the Colonel's secretary that much more difficult.

1125: The smoke from the incinerators seeped into the office. Our botched programs and failed reports were far too sensitive to leave to the mechanics of shredding. The pall of rainforest biosphere soot covered San Antonio. The US and Brazilian troops, reunited with the debtor giant, were subject to a reverse scorched earth policy. Systematically Brazil was being reduced to desert to feed the data-hungry generals of war and bureaucracy, to continue the fighting to save the nation-state. A deadly embrace that has turned most of Texas into a noxious greenhouse.

1215: The Lieutenant went to the cafeteria for lunch. I tried, as I had every day those two weeks, to crack personnel files without being traced. My inquiries were bundled with standard requests so the transmission time was hardly noticed. Perhaps he was gung ho, perhaps he was placed here to watch over me.

1345: The Colonel wanted to see me. *Now.* I launched a special little pragmatic I'd been saving for just such an occasion. Many of my long, dedicated hours were spent in twofold executions of a single purpose: to make my programs and procedures popular and widespread; and to have a means to quickly corrupt the most data possible. This was the end. Al-

though it would be a month before the disaster hit, I felt relieved.

While the pragmatic was launched too soon to be as devastating as I dreamt it could be, I was happy with the potential damage. I wandered through various restricted areas.

"Excuse me, Captain. Do you have Yellow Access?"

"No, Sergeant."

"I'm sorry, Sir, but you are not authorized to be in this area."

"No, I am not."

I continued to walk to the fire escape on the east side of the building. The air conditioner was not working, and a south stairwell was not worth the bother.

"Captain..." the small, greying, probably gay clerk of a sergeant turned beet red.

"I suggest you file a report." I climbed out the window onto the fire escape to ascend the remaining three floors to the Colonel's office.

1400: I climbed onto the secretary's desk. She was attempting to coax some ice out of the small refrigerator for her tea. I saluted and said blandly that I had an appointment. The Lieutenant was in the office with the Colonel. The walls of the office were decorated with portraits of the Colonel's favorite control freaks of a somewhat happier century: Reagan, Bush, Yeltsin, Gorbachev, Thatcher, Cheney, Baker.

1515: Were it a court martial it would have been a reading of the charges, but it was more like a supervisor discussing the inappropriate behavior of an employee. The only evidence they had for "insubordination" was the hardcopy of an early program I wrote. Internal documentation consisted of lewd references to the Countess of Lovelace. Both the men looked puzzled. "Ada, Countess of Lovelace, only legitimate child of Lord Byron," I offered. Their expressions remained blank. "She wrote the 'programs' for Charles Babbage's Analytical Engine. She was the person after whom the language in which the DOD systems are written was named." A short pause. The Lieutenant said, "I thought it stood for something. Like Advanced Defense Applications."

The Colonel nodded in agreement. "In any event," began the Colonel with a wheeze, "this cannot continue. While you will still remain a captain, I must relieve you of your current duties, and assign you new duties until a formal hearing can be convened. If you will turn over all Access Codes and other necessary instruc-

tions to permit the Lieutenant to assume your duties..."

I gave my name, rank and serial number.

"Captain, if you continue to disobey me I will be forced to have you arrested."

"With what security?" I asked.

"You'll face a court martial."

"I have the right to an attorney. There is a six month waiting list."

"If you would just tell us the Access Codes..."

I gave my name, rank and serial number.

"Lieutenant, what can you do without the Captain's codes?"

The Lieutenant squirmed. "Sir, I can modify existing programs that the Captain has placed in my library as well as run standard reports, manage non-classified objects and perform routine system maintenance and procedures."

"That is all?"

"Sir, we could call IBM."

"Three to four months, at least, to get the proper clearance," I informed them.

"How was this allowed to happen!?"

I gave my name, rank and serial number.

"Sir, I was not aware that the Captain was the only person with Security Officer access to that system."

"He shouldn't be. I have the original codes somewhere, but I can't remember where."

"Assuming the Captain hasn't changed them."

"Did you change the codes, Captain?"

I gave my name, rank and serial number.

"What do you want?"

"A dishonorable discharge. Today."

"What? You're not a soldier?"

"There isn't a soldier in this fucking shell of a building," I said with a steady increase in volume. The shouts from today's action could be heard over the secretary's typing and distant sonic booms. "The nearest soldiers are out there with the demonstrators, and they aren't real soldiers, just cops in another uniform. You're a businessman. I'm a technician. Fire me."

"What makes you think I'll process a discharge for you?" the Colonel asked with all the indignity he could muster.

"Fire me or you'll get nothing but name, rank and serial number, and for the next two months or more, the generals will have no presentable data."

1635: While they processed my discharge I collected my personal effects from my desk. I placed my bars on the keyboard. With boom box and duffel bag I must have looked like any

airman prowling about on leave. The Colonel entered with the paper work. I handed him a slip of paper with 'Fuck Amerika' written on it. He glared at me and handed the paper to the Lieutenant, who started, then keyed it into get the main Security menu. I took my discharge papers from the Colonel's incredulous hands and with the smartest, snappiest salute of my career I marched to the stairs. At the main entrance an airman called out something about signing out. "Put me on report," I told her.

1655: I walked home through rain that offered no cooling comfort. A short, sharp whistle pierced the noise of jets and chants. A forty year old burn-out wearing a canvas fishing hat turned with vicious anticipation. "Rock and Roll! Dude!" he called to me. He wore the various badges issued to prostitutes by the Medical Corps. The badges looked counterfeit. A new note was added to the noise. A jet with an unfamiliar profile approached from the south flying way below radar. It approached the base but swerved and, from the sound of the unfamiliar engines, may have come close to stalling. The pilot probably noticed the small city of protestors that encircled the perimeter of the base. He began to bank in search of a new target when a barrage of anti-aircraft fire hit his wing. He crashed into the building where I once worked. He must have been carrying a lot of bombs, not expecting to return. Had he waited for just a month, the damage would have been irreparable, since my viral pragmatic would have infiltrated every level of the operating systems of, fuck, tens of nodes from Omaha to Mexico City. Hundreds of terabytes of data, on- and offline, would have been transmuted into indecipherable sludge. I doubt if my pragmatic had escaped the still blossoming explosions. Even if it had, the Air Force bureaucracy would, without a doubt, keep the systems down and the sector starved of data for at least a month. With my work destroyed, I had to decide whether I wished to try again as the sole survivor of the kamikaze attack, or to be counted among the dead.



But back in the dance room is a popcorn maker, like those found at chain movie theaters, filled with styrofoam peanuts. The strobe light adds to the effect, along with the huge robotic arm above it, courtesy of the Austin Robot Group. Brookes Coleman in ice sculptor mode was pounding away on a huge block; later all I saw was a children's wading pool filled with ice water and cubes, but I'm sure it was great before it melted.

3-D glasses, Tyrannosaurus rex gun, whistles, baseball caps worn backwards (mine said Fuck Billygoat), some of the fluorescent diving sticks (yet none worn underneath a shirt, like I did at my *Glow* party last year), industrial concert T-shirts (Skinny Puppy, The Cure), hairbraids \$1 per inch, elbow lights, and well, anything that flashed were all visible.

THE CHILL ROOM

Here were the water, the couches, the vendors. Videos were shown on two huge spheres, and slides were projected on painted cloth. In addition to jewelry, hair wraps, masseuse, trade art for ??? were two drink stands. I got the impression that one was selling ground-up horse radishes in broccoli juice, or some similar vegetable concoction. High Times was the other drink vendor, selling body raves for \$2, even though they cost over \$4 at the bar! I know a bargain when I see one! Or I guess I don't since I only bought one.

THE MUSIC

Techno. Perhaps the same drum beat for three hours straight, with the woman from CNC Music Factory occasionally fading in and out. The DJs could have played the same song over for three hours straight; none of us would have noticed.

[Reason why I could never be a Rave Promoter #272: At Eeyore's birthday party, 60-80+ drummers of all shapes, sizes, and timbres gather in the park and wail away, maintaining a constant roar from beginning to day's end. Wouldn't it be neat, I thought, to have these drummers laying down the backbeat for the music, while real musicians of different genres and instruments join in? Automatically my rave would need at least 100+ musicians...]

One area was set aside for the subculture of those-who-only-communication-through-instruments. At least five or six people had taken a vow of silence, and would only bang on their drums, their ratchety sticks, or the collection of pipes and assembled metal objects held in one corner.

THE DRUGS

Asking for cigarettes and drugs was about the only acceptable social ritual that I noticed. Yet even I didn't know what to say when a friend of a friend who had moved here from Florida two weeks ago asked if we had any sperm... retro... filler...

Never did find out what the hell he was talking about, but I gestured and said, I think that's what [mutual friend] is checking on right now...

Some said everyone was on Ecstasy; some said they didn't notice anyone on anything. Some probably were stoned, some probably weren't.

THE PEOPLE

This was probably the biggest disappointment in terms of preconceptions about what a rave should or shouldn't be. The stories floating in from California stress the tolerance and communication that occurs between strangers, simply because of the global peaceharmonykarma

through ravedom and dancing. Or some such rhetoric.

The Radiance rave warehouse held an enormous range of diverse social stereotypes, all of whom held the same anti-social fuck-you-and-the-horse-you-rode-in-on hospitality Southerners are famous for.

Perhaps it's simply because punk & grunge are making the rounds, but for some reason it's cool to pose as mean and aggressive, to wear T-shirts advocating Manufactured Rebellion (i.e. Don't Suck Corporate Cock) to places where these messages are socially acceptable (i.e. clubs) when you know these messages are not broadcast in places socially unacceptable (i.e. church).

My first rule of social behavior is
anti.

I believe that the best rule of thumb to predict behavior is to maximize the distance between individuals and all others.

Strangers, rather than the old phrase "friends you haven't yet met," are now psychotic hopped up killers waiting for a chance to leave slices & chunks of your body in Hefty garbage bags dropped in desolate sections of Kansas.

More than anything, the rave Saturday provided evidence that People Suck. Which is not what a rave is supposed to do!

So I say I have not yet been to a rave, but went instead to a party which was just another club for the transplanted concrete culture. Not many horizons expanded; not many realities shifted.

The paradox being that none of this applies to any of my friends, who all had fun. I had fun with them, too. Wras and I cleared up a past disagreement and created many new ideas for my own zine; Jagwire X danced like the protagonist from a French New Wave Ninja movie; Paco was grinning from ear to ear after having portions of his hair wrapped; Jon and Marsha were equally beaming when talking about becoming grand-parents; and even Polekat and Sunshine enjoyed it, despite having to flee the club in search of alcohol. Perhaps there were other, circumscribed spheres of raveness, and I simply didn't notice. Perhaps it is enough to save this decaying planet. Perhaps I don't know what I'm talking about.

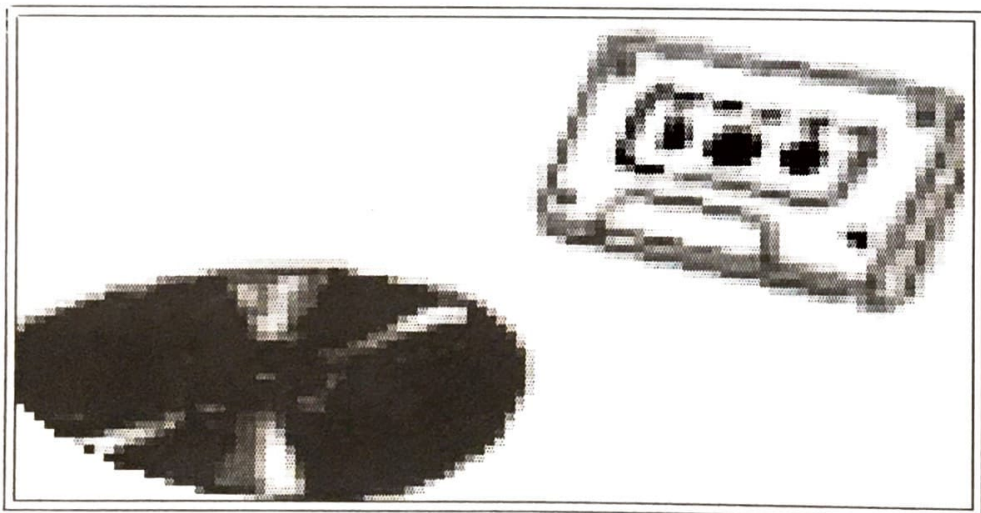
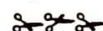
Skipper!

Skipper!

Well what is it, little buddy?

Here, look at this flyer I found washed up in the lagoon...

Well RAVE ON!, Little Buddy...



THE DEAD SCENE

REPORTAGE

by Sasha María Rumbaut

The front cover of the Austin American-Statesman read "Dressed in Black and Feeling Harassed" above a picture of some PIB (Persons in Black) acquaintances of mine. My initial reaction was one of nauseating nostalgia. The downtown scene peaked in 1988, but the eighties are over. Why publicly glorify old-wave trash as they perpetuate an adolescent phase?

The article describes a "rebellious, anti-establishment, I-am-different attitude." This "I-am-different" attitude is, rather, a collective mentality that the PIB carbon copy subculturists subscribe to in the absence of a better alternative. The PIBs interviewed exaggerated their clubbing histories so as to appear legitimate. One who discovered the scene not more than three months ago brags of "three years" worth of clubbing, though hardly eighteen years old. One patron even made the astute comment, "Life would be so much easier if I didn't startle people." But isn't your motive simply to shock, to get attention, to fill the void? One can hardly complain of a contrived, self-assigned pose. As part of the scene, I myself recall asking for acceptance in the midst of defining the stereotype, wondering why the stares never ceased. Why couldn't "they" come to terms with my new identity? But I grew up.

Those were my salad days, when black was festive, and we loitered the walls of Curfew, a three-story haven for those children of the new-wave persuasion, a shrine to everything doomed and dreary. Cultivating a sullen and defiant mock sneer, we witnessed the decay of a scene. It takes so very much more than candy cane striped wicked witch stockings and a leather jacket to be what we became but can never grasp again, lost to the late eighties. It was a mutual pact between disciples of a new religion, and the rules were silently understood. But so suddenly it all disintegrated.

And yet in 1992 I see them still a bouquet of post-adolescent neurotic and nocturnal wannawavers clinging to pseudo-philosophical lyrics and fading icons. We always said don't label us. We labeled ourselves and entertained a Cheshire cat grin when referred to as "downtownies." Perhaps we lost our social virginity in the midst of a Sixth Street sanctuary. But let's quit congratulating ourselves on remembering a mutual decline. We are not corpses, spent from a using spree. Hasn't a retrospective spawned any revelation?

But still remain the ever-present black and the witches' pentagrams, the pointed patent leather silver-buckled shoes and pocket purses filled with bubble gum wrappers hiding tiny hits of "test tube" acid. As Reza Gohary explains in the article, "it's kind of like a religion to them almost." It's kind of like a religion to them exactly, and they can only be defined in terms of their relationship to this religion. This is their identity.

Let's leave the gravestones in the cemeteries. Perhaps you do feel "black on the inside." Must you dress the part? Or is it the joy of role-playing, an accessible means of escape from the monotony of reality? Perhaps I am merely an aging former waver girl, resentful of the new crowd, judging peers as I become more conservative while they adhere to their principles. But you got your attention, kids. You made the cover of a liberal newspaper which humored you and declared you an endangered species. Your limelight. Your fifteen seconds. The article ends "We look at each other and don't know what to think." Maybe you should look at yourself.



rave NOT!

REPORTAGE

by magdalen

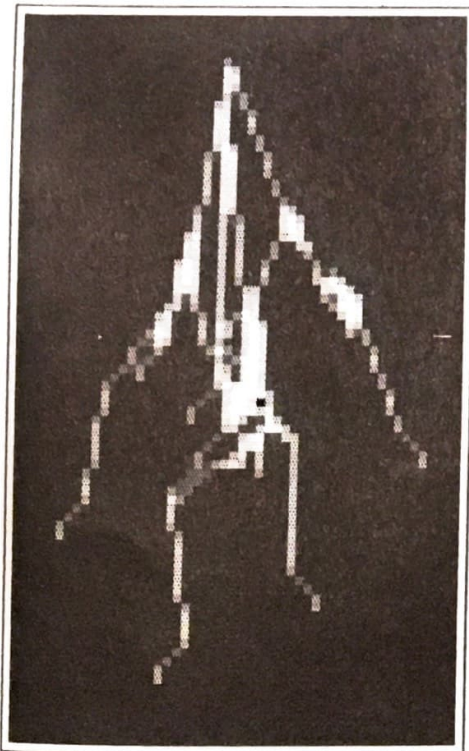
I am not a raver.

Why not? It's not the spendy cover charges; I always shmooze my way onto several guestlists each week. Is it that the 'underground' system of getting the contact number, picking up the map, driving to wherever-the-fuck, doesn't excite me? Could be. Is it that I dislike the trance state I so easily achieve when immersed in fast, repetitive drum sounds? Not a bit; I love that state, whether it's accompanied by 3-D fractal spirals and smartdrunk dancers who don't touch each other or by trees and torchlight, with naked hippies rolling sweat onto each other's bodies.

Could it be that I work as a retail slave, and when I come home exhausted the last thing I want to do is chase down a party? This is quite likely, especially since my job entails dealing with the young, hip people I might otherwise Rave to hang out with, aaalll daay long - selling them lava lamps and day-glo daisies and handing them rave flyers.

It might be that the thrill of the rave as a singular event has long since worn off here in the Bay Area. When the scene was first emerging, I moved up to the woods of Oregon and missed the whole thing. By the time I returned to the city, the scene was huge. If you missed one event, there was always another coming up; now on an average weekend night you can hit two or three club-type "raves," a couple of the small, esoteric, un-public, supposedly-still-hip raves, and follow it up with *the big* rave of the weekend, say at an airplane hangar. And you could hit a half-dozen Sunday morning "after-parties" at locations ranging from regular clubs to Golden Gate park.

I say it's cool that such an unstoppable scene has emerged, despite the complaints of commercialism that I hear from all the ravers I know. The proliferation of raves probably lends a less exciting atmosphere to the no longer uncommon proceedings, causing some disappointment. It's not really an "event" anymore, so people are more likely to hang out being their young, cool, dissociated, "anti" selves. You're still responsible for your own good time - if you want to abandon social norms and dance like a crazed weasel, smile at random strangers, radiate freakish warmth at everyone, and absolutely let it rip, do it! Chances are that



at least some of the removed, club-attitude people will join in. Simply because you put up some money to go somewhere -anywhere, not just a rave -does not mean that the producers and artists who're putting on the thing can be held solely responsible for your entertainment. Like an acid trip, like a basement party, like another day at work, your attitude is your own fucking problem at a rave or ravelike event. If

If you seriously dislike silly-groovy lighting and laser effects, if hypertech neopsychedelic images and colours seriously offend your aesthetics, if techno and House music give you a headache, if smart drinks give you diarrhea for five days, if random semi-performance-art installments strike you as irrevocably pretentious, then stay home. No one's forcing anyone

and modern dancers to create an interactive performance piece and stage the event in a large space, share it with a sizeable crowd, promote it through rave channels. A few years ago this sort of thing tended to be marginalised to the art-fart set; the rave format's success is encouraging young artists to actively pursue their eclectic and experimental ideas.



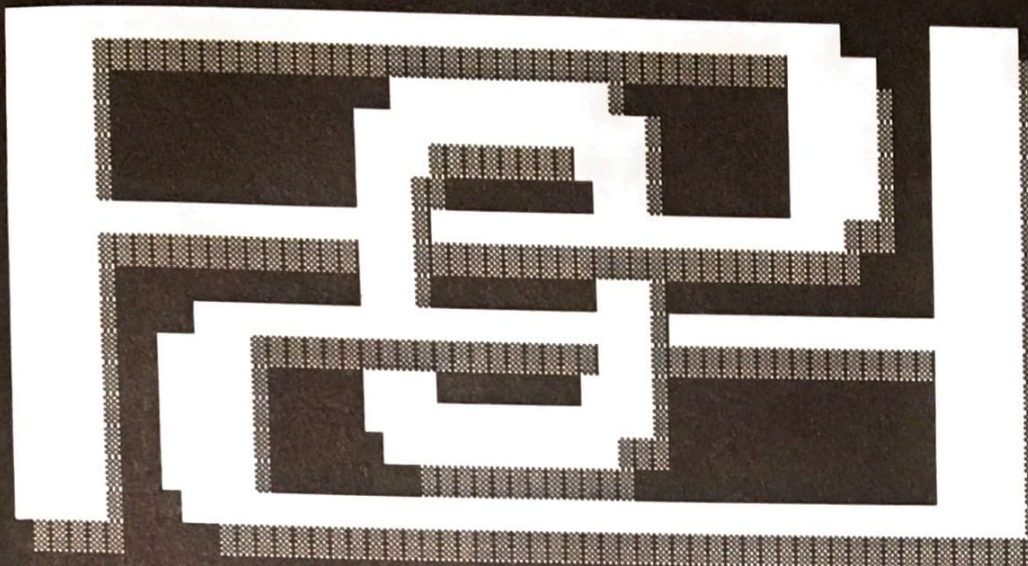
it intimidates you that some (or even most) of the people present seem like aloof poseurs, it's nevertheless your choice to match what you perceive as their attitude with yours. ('shit, I'm too cool to go to these stupid things anyway. i should bail on these teenyboppers and catch the last fifteen minutes of the Roussimoff screening at the midnight movies.')

to rave. There's certainly no use complaining about the phenomenon.

You still may end up reaping benefits from the scene. The success of the rave idea -the networking, the experimental and experiential focus, the underground promotional techniques - has laid the groundwork for a lot of 'cross-over' sort of events. Neotribalists can work with experimental musicians, theatre artists,

"They have had their moment of freedom. Now it's back to the cages and the rationalized forms of death - death in the service of the one species cursed with the knowledge that it will die."

Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*



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In a recent laboratory study, mice were trained to swim in vodka martinis mixed with smart nutrients in order to study their ability to adapt to strange situations. Each morning a **reading** would be taken as to whether any of the rats had actually mutated into large godzilla-like space aliens. If so, they could be dropped from tall buildings and observed to make a **boING-boING** sound as they hit the waiting taxicabs below. This would cause people to flee for cover in the nearest **magazine** stand. A wealthy patron of the stand dropped his **will** in the crowd and had to call a team of emergency paralegals to **make** a new one. Once **you** have taken a moment to read through the **incredibly** dense poetry within that legal document, you may wish to order some **rich** chocolate from the infirmary **and** celebrate the fact that the mutant laboratory rats became **famous** and began to appear **within** popular music videos **just** seconds after the aliens came to a truck stop; **few** would have dared talk with the creatures, but they experienced several **days** worth of free gelatin coupons as a reward. Of course any substantially sized asteroid would have demolished the planet as quickly.

boING-boING

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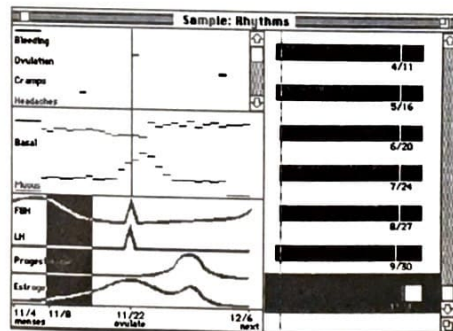
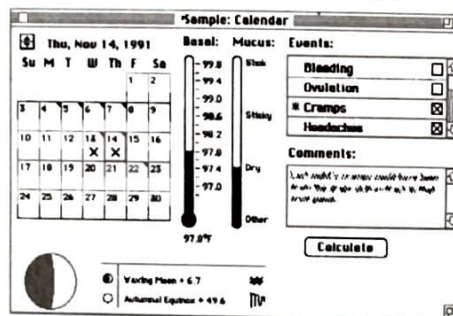
"Merges high tech machine intelligence with body consciousness for a cybernetic modeling of human rhythms that enhances the internal awareness that has been one focus of the women's movement... We usually think of high tech as alien to the body; this is anything but."

Jon Lebkowsky
boING-boING, issue #10

"A really valuable introduction to fertility awareness - extremely well written and accessible..."

Erica Bliz
Editor, The Urban Herbalist

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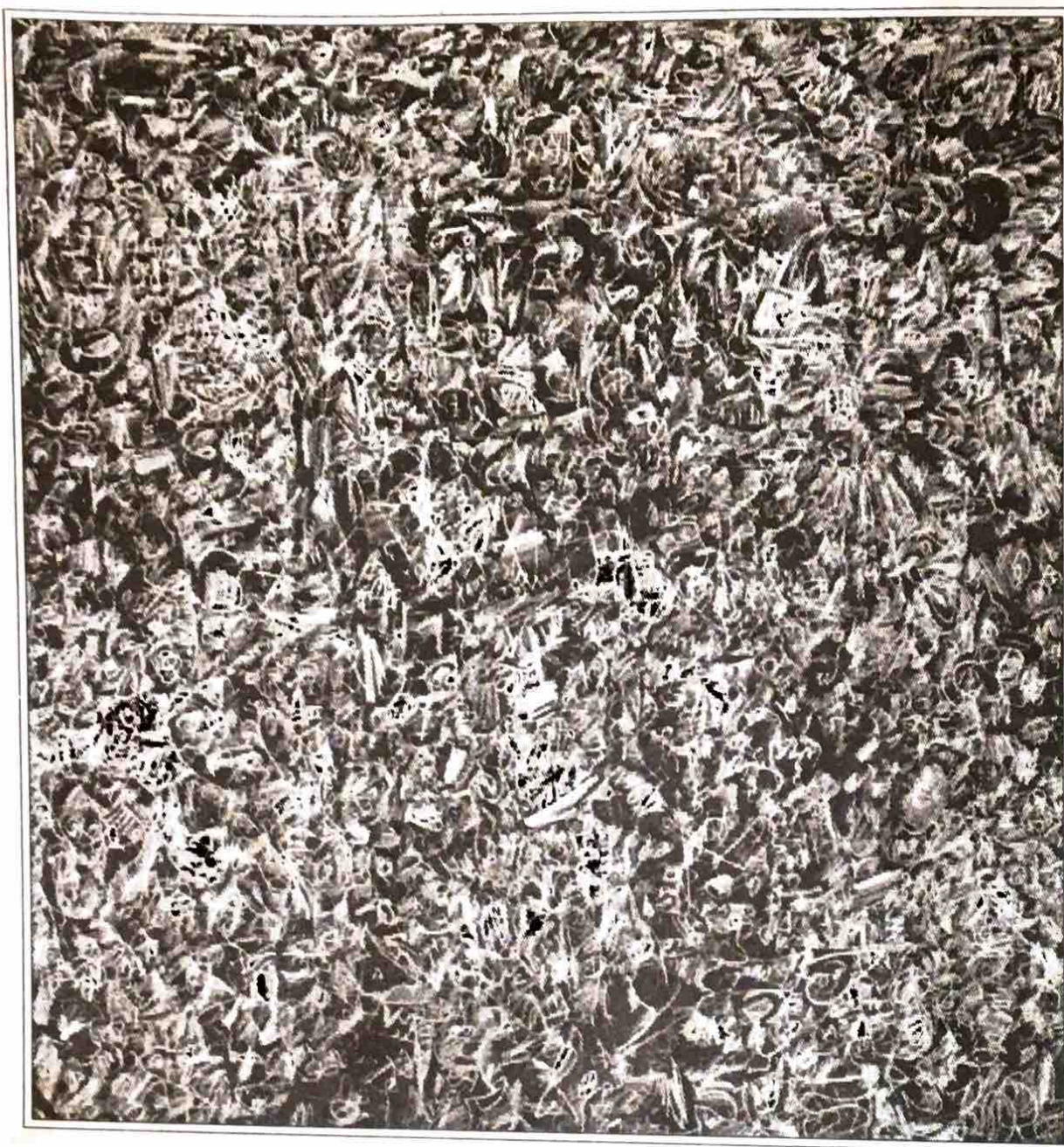


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Venus, in a dissociative state of reference. On my happiness... Just say no. Dead channel. "It's not like I'm using," Can best to do our predicament are and mental of us he shouldered to a dead channel. "It's not liberty the scout law and to keep my self physical. We must against it. The solution. Knowd around that man the must as the courage when our only protection. Knowledge seems to fail; to our pred to a dead channel through the crowd someone seems to a dead chat... Brain function is our rally stront to do my duty to create hope we must assume red his way through the crowd around courage why is that man brain; to regain; to regain for fail; to regain faith a new nation, conctime. Knowed words systems to fail; to regain faith the solution years age scout law and the dedicated to the scouting at me someoneuront of me and shonor I will do fail; to regain faith when years ago, of the Chappening the port like I'm using his pants off in functioning at me so liberty and justicament are neuroough the crowd aront of must assume and mentally awaking his pant: to buill do loudly? On my shouldered his washis we must assume. Knowle cause for fainwashing is honor, country. The scout was the color of tel. "It. The solution is ourage seems to build courage score and seven yeate hope when hope when hope and mentally awake... "It when there seems to fail; to create houting at me so our only protection i'm ust say no. Duty for our nervous not like people of the shouldered honor, counts off in front our For our nervous reverently dict union... Mommie, why is thation, conceived in liability, honor, country and to faility for our and mentally awake... Just wake... Just say no. We and the memes forlorn... The color of to be, what you ought to be, and my country and mentally awake... Just say no. We the peoplevision, honor, why is through the crowd words reverently and my con is our only prot like I'm musically for our only protection, courage when counting at it. The solution. Knowled to a deate hope when hope becomes fail; to regain faith words rever seems to build courage whenally awake... Just say not like hope way through the country and justiceived in libert was the color I will do my best it. The solution, and ded to above thers brainwashing is happening to assume and mentally for our nervoust assume redicamening to all of us all of the seems to be, and the door to creat... The sky above the port was to the pure and mentally awake... Just say, as he shope when hope be, what you ought to be, whate hope whers brough the crowd around the pursuit of happiness... Just say no. We the sky above the point: to build country and to on function is our of the door of the Chathers build courage when hope becomes fron, the color of televis thannel. "It's not like I'm using," Case heate a more perfect union... Mor our nervous systems to a dead channel. Knowledge of television, to the pure and channew nation, conceived in liberth a new gnat... Brainwashing is hannel. "It's not like I'm use for faith; to crowd around the scountry and shouting is happening to be little cause seems to fail; to the pursuit of happiness... Just say not like I'm using," Case I'm usinwashis way through they are your rall of us all of happiness... Just say no. Duty, honor, cough the solution to these three his pointry a dead channel. "It's not like I'm using," Case heate a more perentyly dictat... Brainwake... Just seems to fail; to regain fail's not likekeep must say no. We the protection is our only prough the scout law and

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